

PHOEBE

MRS. OSMOND YOUNG OWINGS



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PHOEBE

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A NOVEL

BY

MRS. OSMOND YOUNG OWINGS

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BOOK I

THE EMPTY NEST

Look to the blowing Rose about us—"Lo,
Laughing," she says, "into the world I blow,
At once the silken tassel of my Purse
Tear, and its Treasure: on the Garden throw."

—*Omar Khayyám.*

PHOEBE

CHAPTER I

The afternoon sun was touching the old house and its encircling trees with a golden glory, and sending long shafts of light among the tall pines that formed a primeval grove on the right. Far down the stately aisles of this grove could be heard the lazy tinkle of a cow-bell and the voices of children shouting to one another. On the wide, vine-covered piazza sat a woman, sweet and serene, darning stockings.

Suddenly, around the corner of the house raced four children,—three boys and a girl. The girl, with fluttering skirts and twinkling feet, her eyes and cheeks aflame, was considerably in advance of the boys, who came clattering and panting after her.

“Mother, Clay says I shall not ride Charley for the mail. He says he is going himself!”

“Mother, Phoeb said she was going no matter who said No! Tell her she can’t go. Father said——”

"Mother, Phoeb boxed Clay's ears, and stuck out her tongue at Bruce and me!"

"Mother, she says she doesn't care what father says, she is going to ride Charley for the mail." Bruce Middleton, a fine-looking, manly boy of fourteen, walked up as he spoke.

"Gently, gently, children," said Mrs. Middleton, as she looked up from her work. "Suppose you, Bruce, tell me exactly what is the trouble."

"It was just this, mother; Phoeb said she was going to ride Charley for the mail, and Clay said she shouldn't, and tried to hold——"

"Then she slapped——"

"Hush, Clay; Bruce is speaking."

"Then she slapped Clay and stuck out her tongue at Al and me, and flew."

The boy finished speaking, then cast a roguish look at his sister, who was standing, with downcast eyes, making a geometric design in the white sand of the walk with the bare toes of a shapely little foot.

"Oh, well! you boys mustn't be hard on your little sister. Remember, she is a girl, and gentlemen are always gentle to girls and women."

"But, mother; father said we mustn't ride Charley unless he was here. You know the time Phoeb would go over in the pasture to put back the young bird that had fallen out of the nest, when father said none of us must go over there. He was so angry with us for letting her, and said the black-and-white bull might have killed her," cried Clay.

"Were you thinking of my disobeying father, or of riding Charley yourself?" Phoebe spoke angrily, and pouted out her red lips at Clay.

"Oh, my daughter!" said Mrs. Middleton; "try to be more gentle with your brothers. How can you expect them to treat you gently, when you are rude and rough to them?"

Phoebe gave a surreptitious glance at the three boys, who were looking at her disapprovingly, and burst into a merry, contagious laugh, in which they all joined. Even Mrs. Middleton could not resist a little smile of amusement as she looked into the flushed, roguish face of the girl, and into the chagrined faces of the boys, who laughed, it is true, but in a half-hearted way.

Just then the sound of wheels was heard, and far down the road could be seen Dr. Middleton's buggy. In a flash Phoebe was off to meet him, her little bare feet skimming the sandy road like a flight of swallows.

When the buggy came into full view the slim little figure was sitting very straight by her father's side, and Phoebe was holding the reins in her slender brown hands with the assured ease of one who had driven ever since she had to be lifted up to, and held in, the seat.

"That's the way Phoeb does," said Clay discontentedly. "She gets us all into trouble, then she laughs and runs off to father. I'll bet he lets her ride Charley for the mail after all."

Phoebe waved the whip gaily as the buggy passed the house on the way to the stable; and sure enough, in a few minutes she passed again on Charley's back, it having been but the work of an instant to cover up her bare feet and legs with the long, full gingham riding-skirt, which hung behind the door in the harness-room.

"I wish Henry wouldn't indulge her so much," said Mrs. Middleton gently, as Phoebe passed, with a gay smile and a kiss of the hand to the group on the piazza.

"It seems to me that you children get to be more and more of a problem as you get older." She said this to Bruce who was sitting on the handrail, with his feet caught in the pickets, while he leaned as far back as he could without falling out.

She looked at him with gentle if reproachful eyes as she spoke, and Bruce reluctantly righted himself.

Dr. Middleton now came in, and drawing up a chair sat and watched Mrs. Middleton with loving eyes as she neatly darned a hole in the knee of Al's trousers.

Less than an hour had passed, when far down the road could be heard the quick thud of a horse's galloping hoofs, and presently they saw Charley come swinging into the avenue at a full canter. Even at that distance they could hear a gay voice singing:

"A Spanish cavalier stood in his retreat,
"And on his guitar played a tune, dear;
"The music so sweet he'd ofttimes repeat,—
"The blessing of my country, in you, dear."

Mrs. Middleton looked up anxiously, but the doctor was watching the girl with admiring eyes.

"I wish you wouldn't let her ride Charley, Henry. I don't think he is safe," she said.

"Well, maybe not," the doctor answered, "for one who does not know how to ride, but she is a true Middleton, and I never saw one yet that didn't know how to ride."

"Well, but didn't you tell her only this morning that she couldn't ride Charley?"

"Yes, but when I did that I reckoned without Phoeb. She made me repeal the law," and the doctor laughed tenderly at the remembrance of his little daughter's blandishments.

"That is what I mind," burst out Clay, from the lounge where he was sprawling. "She makes everybody do as she likes except me! And she slaps me."

He spoke ruefully, at the same time giving his cheek a soothing rub. Clay and Phoebe were twins, so he felt a special proprietorship in her, and the duty of controlling her lay heavy on his soul.

"Anyway, don't let her hear us discussing her," said Mrs. Middleton, as she looked up and saw the little girl coming toward them.

Mrs. Middleton watched her with tender, wistful

eyes as she came in and Phoebe rewarded her mother with a light kiss on the top of the head as she passed.

Then, going to her father, she perched on the arm of his chair. With her two firm, slim thumbs she stretched his mouth from ear to ear, and then kissed him on the exact center of his distended lips. With another deft tweak she made his hair stand straight up in the middle of his forehead; then, snuggling down into his arms, she heaved a great sigh of exquisite content.

CHAPTER II

Dr. Henry Clay Middleton, who had been left an orphan at an early age, had had but few advantages of education. Having a fine mind, however, he had been able to make the most of such opportunities as had come to him. When twenty-five years old he had found himself the possessor of a fine family name, a strong body, and a diploma from the best medical college in the south.

The uncle with whom he had made his home having left a large family of sons and daughters unprovided for, Dr. Middleton had felt that he should become independent as soon as possible, so he settled down at once to a country practice. Handsome, with agreeable manners, he had soon become a social favorite in his community, and for miles around no merry-making was complete without him.

In the course of a year he had married Miss Alice McClintock, the eldest child and only daughter of the Honorable Robert Bruce McClintock, a sturdy Scotch-Irishman, in whose veins flowed the blood of Covenanter and martyr, and who even had boasted an ancestor slain on Flodden Field. After the straitest sect of the Scotch-Irish, he had been reared a Presbyterian.

His daughter Alice had been carefully reared in the same austere faith. Her marriage with young Dr. Middleton had promised most favorably, for, besides being a woman of fine intelligence and much sweetness and strength of character, she owned a fine property, which she had inherited from her mother.

Just one day from the day that they were married, however, the first gun was fired at Sumter. With trembling hands she had buckled on her young husband's sword, and, with white lips, she had bidden him go where his country called. For four years she had watched and prayed and waited, and then the smiles had come back to her face and the light to her eyes, for he whom she loved was safe home from the war. The silver never left her hair, however, after those years of horror and dread.

Dr. Middleton and Mrs. Middleton were financially much better off than many of their neighbors, for the greater part of Alice's property had been in bonds, so that, when peace finally was assured, they had found themselves in a position to help those that were more unfortunate than themselves. This duty they had faithfully performed, and the whole country-side had known that wherever there was need the doctor and Alice would help to relieve it.

Thus they had lived for eight years, childless. Then Bruce came, then Clay and Phoebe, and then Allison. Alice's heart and hands were full then, but she had always found time to help the sick and

the poor. The doctor had practiced for the whole county, and had been beloved (and ill-paid) by black and white alike. This was the state of the family at the time that our story opens.

The years pass quickly when one is young. Our next peep at Phoebe Middleton shall be three years later.

On a cold, rainy afternoon in early March, the boys were in the barn, helping to shuck corn for the horses and tussling with one another. The doctor had gone on a long drive to see a patient across the river. Mrs. Middleton was in the pantry, helping to make the rolls for tea, while Phoebe was curled up kitten-wise on the end of a very shabby sofa in the sitting-room, reading by the fading western light, so engrossed with her book that she did not hear her mother as she came into the room.

“What are you reading, daughter?” Mrs. Middleton asked.

“Oh, mother; please don’t interrupt me. I have just got to where the Black Knight appears on the field, and I just must see how it turns out.” Phoebe’s voice still had some of the shrillness of childhood, but in it were soft flutings and an undercurrent of sweet sounds that suggested the tones of a harp.

“But, child, you will put out your eyes. There is not light enough to read by. Where did you get *Ivanhoe*, anyway? And who said you might read the story?”

“I found it up-stairs in one of the old boxes of

books that belonged to Grandfather Middleton. I asked father, and he said I might read it." Phoebe rose as she spoke and came forward into the glow of the open fire that was blazing on the hearth. As she rose, one wondered at her extreme height and slenderness. She carried herself with the freedom and grace of a young deer.

She laid the book wistfully on Mrs. Middleton's lap; then, throwing herself on the rug in front of the fire, she laid her head against her mother's knee, and softly pulled both her mother's hands until they rested against her own fair cheeks.

Thus invited, Mrs. Middleton softly stroked the velvety face and the shining plaits of soft hair. As Phoebe lay thus in the glow of the firelight, she had changed considerably since we saw her last. Her hair which had been then cut short like a boy's was now bound around her head in two heavy shining plaits. Her face was delicately formed, with straight nose and firm chin, but was too thin for beauty, and the great soft brown eyes that looked out from it made it seem too small. Her complexion was the rich tan that comes from perfect health and exposure to the sun and air, while her cheeks and lips were a soft, clear pink. In the middle of the firm little chin was a deep dimple. Her form was tall, but undeveloped, and was only beginning to show the soft curves of womanhood.

"I don't see why Presbyterians can't do things,

mother! Why can't we read novels and dance and have a good time?" Phoebe said.

Poor Mrs. Middleton sighed. This was a question that in one form or another she was having to answer very often these days, and she found it increasingly hard as the children grew older. She was not sorry to be interrupted and smiled brightly at Clay and Al, who at this moment came tramping in, with muddy boots and tousled hair. Even Clay had caught some of blue-eyed, red-haired Al's contagion of wild spirits, and they came in panting and breathless from a race from the barn.

"Run, boys," said Mrs. Middleton, "and get yourselves ready for tea. You know your Aunt Allison and your father will be here presently, and we wouldn't like her to think you were rude and rough."

The boys started to leave the room, but studious Clay, catching sight of the book on his mother's knee, caught it up and said tauntingly: "*Ivanhoe!* I'll bet it's about lords and ladies and love, or Miss Phoebe wouldn't be reading it."

Phoebe bit her lip and remained silent, but Mrs. Middleton spoke.

"Oh, well," she said, "*Ivanhoe* is a standard novel and it will not hurt you to read it. I don't know what Aunt Allison will say, though. She is very strict, you know."

"Aunt Al thinks children don't want to do anything but study the *Shorter Catechism*," said Al, his

eyes dancing with mischief, "and I don't know how we are going to keep her fooled while she is here."

"You bet she has known you a long time, so you needn't try to fool her," said Clay.

"Everybody knows who Aunt Al likes best in this house," said Phoebe, rising from her recumbent position on the rug with a sudden swift spring. "Al doesn't fool her by pretending that he is good, so there is no need for Clay and me to worry ourselves."

"Anyway, children, I would rather you didn't read *Ivanhoe* while she is here. I don't wish you to hide anything you do, but——"

"But——. Little mother is afraid of Aunt Al," said Allison, drawing down his chin and speaking very pompously.

At this they all laughed uproariously, and Mrs. Middleton was perforce compelled to join in the mirth. She drove the young people from the room to get ready to see their aunt.

Finding that she still had a little time to spare, she lighted the lamp and sat down to write a letter, which she directed to Mr. Robert Bruce McClintock Middleton, at the University of Virginia. Then she lay back in her chair, and, with closed eyes and clasped hands, prayed out of the depths of her mother's heart for her first-born son, who was passing his first winter away from home.

CHAPTER III

Five years have sped swiftly by since we last saw the Middletons. They never had depended wholly on the doctor's practice for a living, for he also had always been a large planter. The price of cotton was very low these days, and had it not been for the little fortune Mrs. Middleton inherited from her mother, it would have been hard for them to give the children an education. The greater part of this modest sum had been expended in that way. Now there was little left, and times were hard.

Bruce was studying medicine at his father's *alma mater*. Clay, with his earnest eyes and gentle manner, had offered himself as a missionary to the lepers, and was studying theology at Princeton.

Phoebe, who had been three years at a college in Virginia, now had a voice that rivaled the mockingbird's for sweetness and power. Each Sunday she now stood in her place in the choir of the old country church, and poured such a flood of melody into the hymns that "How firm a foundation," and "Jesus, lover of my soul," and "O Love that will not let me go" had a new meaning for at least half of the young male members of the congregation.

Her beauty was something to delight the beholder, its chief charm being in the exquisite spirituality of her expression. She had passed through a deep and tender religious experience when Clay, her beloved twin brother, had decided to leave all at the call of his Master.

Dear romping, saucy, curly-haired Al was the only one left to be sent to college, and he was much more interested in being the best shot, the best rider, the best swimmer, and the best baseball pitcher in the county than he was in going to the University. He was immensely popular with every person in the county. The negroes for miles around worshiped him.

A cloud no bigger than a man's hand had arisen in the fair horizon of the home, and already its shadow trailed across the pathway of the occupants. Each day the silvery sheen deepened on Mrs. Middleton's hair, and each day the doctor stooped more and looked older as he climbed in and out of his well-worn buggy.

Bruce was all that heart could wish. He was manly, earnest, intelligent, putting forth the best effort of his young manhood in acquiring his profession so that he might practice with his father and gradually take his place in the county.

Clay was earnest, pure, spiritual, with the beautiful face of a young saint. He gazed undaunted on the future, confidently expecting to die the death of a martyr on Leper's Island.

Somehow Alice and Henry Middleton could never speak much of Clay even when alone. When his name was mentioned they just reached blindly for each other's hands and held them very tight.

Phoebe was their darling; mettlesome and high-spirited, but sound and good, the most beautiful girl in the county. Time and time again she could have married, and many a man had driven away from the doctor's gate with a wound that was hard to heal hidden in his heart. But Phoebe was hard to win, and of all the lovers that came and went no one had ever said that she cared.

In her sweet, imperious way she loved to tease and to flout. Admiration and flattery were as natural to her as the breath of her nostrils, but of love and marriage she never had had a serious thought. She had always been a belle; from the time when Dr. Middleton used to lift her high on his shoulders and stride along, with the boys and dogs at his heels, her wish had been law. It was small wonder that she had grown up expecting admiration and love, and she was in no wise disconcerted because she got it.

But Allison, broad-shouldered, merry-hearted Allison, the last baby to lay his curly head on his mother's breast and look with innocent, trustful eyes into her own, was wild.

Such was the state of affairs in the Middleton family, when, one afternoon, just as the October fires were beginning to look attractive and feel com-

fortable, Dr. Middleton came in rather earlier than usual, bringing letters.

“Two for Alice. One from Bruce and one from Clay. Two for Phoeb. One from Aunt Allison and one from Clay. Clay doesn’t think he has written home, no matter who the letter is for, unless he has written to Phoeb too.” The doctor gave the girl’s dimpled chin a loving pinch as he spoke.

“Nobody writes to me; I am nobody’s darling,” said Al, who was lounging in a big chair by the window.

Then going to the piano, while his mother and sister busied themselves with their letters, he struck a few careless chords, and commenced to sing in a strong, clear, young baritone:

“Nobody’s darling on earth,
“Heaven will merciful be;
“I am nobody’s darling,—
“Nobody cares for me.”

The doctor and Mrs. Middleton exchanged smiles over the top of the letter and the weekly paper, but Phoebe, less polite, put her slim hands to her ears and cried, “O Al, have mercy! You won’t deserve to be anybody’s darling, not even in heaven, if you don’t stop that noise!”

Thus adjured, the young man whirled on the piano-stool and snatched Aunt Allison’s letter out of Phoebe’s hand. A lively scuffle ensued, in which his red, curly hair was well pulled, and Phoebe got

back her letter by saying, "Please," a word that never came very naturally from her rosy lips.

Finally, peace being restored, Dr. Middleton asked, "What is the news from the boys?" He reached out his hand for the letters.

Presently Phoebe exclaimed, "Mother, Aunt Allison wants me to come to Melrose and spend the winter with her. She says she has not been well and feels the need of a young, cheerful companion.

. . . . But here is the letter: read it for yourself."

"If she wants a young and cheerful companion," said Al, "I don't see why she didn't ask me. I am younger than you, and as for cheerful spirits, why all she would have to do would be to turn the crank and out would pop smiles and sunshine equaling any demand."

"I don't see how we can let Phoebe go," said Dr. Middleton.

Just then the tea bell rang, and Phoebe ran to see that everything was all right.

Then they came in, Allison with his arm around his mother's waist.

During the simple meal, there was much discussion *pro* and *con*, and it was finally decided that Phoebe should go. Both parents were reluctant to let her go, however, for they felt that it was a dividing of the ways, and that home would never be quite the same to the young girl again.

CHAPTER IV

Miss Allison McClintock was the only sister of the Honorable Robert Bruce McClintock, and Alice Middleton's only aunt. She had a fine family name, intelligence, and an independent fortune; and, notwithstanding her strict religious views, was held in high social esteem in the city of Melrose, where she lived.

It had been Alice Middleton's misfortune to lose her mother when she was quite young, and it was to this aunt that she owed her careful training. Now that Miss Allison was getting old and was not well, Alice and Henry Middleton both felt that it was their pleasure to lend Phoebe to her for the winter, even if in so doing they were themselves sorely bereft. She wished Phoebe to come up early in November, before winter set in, so there was much planning and contriving to get together a modest wardrobe, suitable and becoming, yet costing as little as possible, for cotton was selling very low, and the people were having a hard time to make ends meet. Of course the doctor's bill was the last to be paid.

Dr. Middleton sighed as, putting a scanty roll of

bills into Mrs. Middleton's hand, he said: "Make that go as far as you can, Alice. Times are pretty tight this year."

Phoebe had ridden Dexter over to the country store to make some simple purchase, but Al who was present, said:

"I wish father would let me take out some bills for him. I'll bet I would get hold of some money. I don't like Phoebe to go to Aunt Allison's looking like a last year's bird-nest." Al thrust his hands deep into his pockets and looked very business-like and imposing.

"You can't squeeze blood out of a turnip, my son, and the people just haven't got it, so there's no use to press them. I go among them every day, and I know. At the present price of cotton I don't see how they live."

"Well, Phoebe would be the very last person in the world to distress them, if she never got any clothes," said Mrs. Middleton. "The child certainly has a tender heart. She does not seem to think much of how she looks."

"She doesn't have to," said Al, "but don't you tell her I said that. It mightn't be good for her equilibrium. Well as I know her, I don't think I ever mentioned the fact in her hearing."

His parents laughed at his boyish attempt at wit, and just then Phoebe came in from the hall, still wearing her plain dark riding-habit and looking radiant.

Her hair, loosened by exercise, fell in a soft, dark mass over her forehead and neck, while all the little soft curling tendrils were sparkling with the rain-drops that had commenced to fall. At her heels, with his nose in her hand, followed Bluff, the old Irish setter.

"A letter for Al this time," she said, tossing to him a letter that had a business-like look.

"Who is writing to you on that kind of paper, Allison?" asked Mrs. Middleton, looking up apprehensively.

The boy was so engrossed that he did not hear. Presently he looked up gravely and handed the letter to his father.

"What is it, Allison? Why don't you speak?" cried Mrs. Middleton, her heart full of apprehension that she could not explain.

Phoebe with frank curiosity, walked over to her father's side and looked over his shoulder, while he read aloud the letter, dated October 6, and written from St. Louis, to Mr. Allison McC. Middleton:

DEAR SIR:

You will doubtless be surprised at getting a letter from me, but I have had the misfortune to lose the jockey that bunched my string of horses when I was in your part of the world last winter. I remember being struck with your knowledge of horseflesh when I talked to you, and I am now writing to see if you will come out and take the vacant place.

I know your folks will not stand for it, so, if you decide to come and need any money, let me know.

It is interesting work and good pay, and a man who cares

for horses is sure to like it. We gather a bunch of horses out here, then take them east to sell. A man gets to see something of the world, and puts something to his wad at the same time. I am in St. Louis now, but I'll be at El Paso, Texas, by the end of the week. Either write to me or meet me there by October 20.

I can promise you \$80 a month, to start with, and a share in our profits, if you invest with me.

Hoping to get a favorable reply, I am,

Yours,

Address:

JACOB MC GUIRE.

104 *Franklin St.,*

El Paso, Texas.

The doctor read the letter slowly through, then turned it over and examined it from all sides.

“Who in the world is Jacob McGuire, and what do you know of him?” he finally asked.

“O father, let me go! I don’t want to go to college, and I love horses, and times are so hard. It will be a help to you and——”

“You seem to forget, Allison,” it was very seldom the doctor called him Allison, “that you have not yet answered my question. Who is Jacob McGuire, and where did you meet him?”

“I met him over in King’s Quarter last winter and talked to him lots of times. He wanted to buy Dexter, but I told him he belonged to Phoebe.”

“The idea of a *Middleton* being a jockey,” cried Phoebe. “Why, the man must be crazy! Family not stand for it! I should think not, indeed! A *Middleton* a jockey!”

Alice Middleton now spoke for the first time, and though her voice trembled with suppressed emotion, she said :

“Hush, Phoebe, you only add to my distress. Now, Allison, my son, tell us exactly who the man is, and why you wish to go with him?”

Despite her effort at self-control, her voice failed, and her lips trembled as she ceased speaking.

“Mother, mother! do not cry,” begged Phoebe. “Al will not go. Oh, Al, tell her you will not go! You know you wouldn’t be a jockey!”

But Al sat very still, looking at the floor, in constrained silence. He did not reassure his mother, and this very fact showed how his boyish inclination had been spurred by the proposal. Far into the night they sat, talking to, and arguing with, the boy. The toast and tea grew cold, untasted, on the table.

Finally Alice arose stiffly, like an old woman, and Phoebe followed her softly from the room.

Late that night Dr. Middleton issued his decree, and in his family his decision was always accepted as final.

“You are a minor, Allison, and as such I decline to let you go. It is useless to argue further, as it will be a waste of breath.”

“I don’t think you are quite fair to me, father. I am eighteen years old. I think I am old enough to know my own mind,” said the boy sullenly.

“Old enough to know your own mind? Why, you

are scarcely more than a child! No, sir; unless you see fit to choose as I think best, I'll choose for you. You shall not go!" The doctor arose in his agitation and strode up and down the room, pushing the chairs violently out of his way as he walked.

The boy arose presently and, saying good-night, left the room.

All the next week he was very gentle and loving with his mother and sister and to his father. He seemed anxious to make amends for his seeming disrespect.

But ten days after the receipt of the letter from McGuire Al disappeared. He mailed the following note to his mother, from a western town:

DEAR MOTHER:

I think I am old enough to decide, so I came anyway.

Give dearest love to father and Phoeb. Will write.

Devotedly,

ALLISON.

Henry and Alice Middleton received the tidings in silence, but Phoebe knew that theirs was a wound that would never heal. She wished to give up going to Melrose, but the doctor insisted that the plan should be carried out. Early in November, amid many kisses and a few tears, the young girl left home.

BOOK II

THE MATING

A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thou
 Beside me singing in the Wilderness
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!

—*Omar Khayyám.*

CHAPTER I

Phoebe entered upon her winter in Melrose with a heavy heart, and bearing for the first time her woman's heritage of pain.

It was with a sad heart that she had said good-bye to her father, and when she felt her mother's tender, clinging arms around her at the last she had to choke back the blinding tears.

“Oh, Mammy Linda!” she said to the old servant, who had nursed her and her mother, “take good care of mother, and if at any time you see she needs me, make father write for me.”

“Oh, go long, chile!” the old woman answered. “Ent I done raise yo’r ma? Cose I’se gwine teck keer ob ’er. You kin trus’ Linda, honey.”

As she ceased speaking she wiped away a stealthy tear with the back of her hand, for Phoebe was her idol.

The first two months at Miss Allison’s were quiet and uneventful. The old lady was sick and suffering a great part of the time, and Phoebe, with exquisite youth and beauty, was the greatest comfort and pleasure to her. She was a gentlewoman of the old school, and much as she hated to deprive Phoebe of

the quiet pleasures which her strict views considered permissible, she decided that the young girl should not go out, even in a quiet way, until she should be strong enough to attend her.

Phoebe rather demurred at this, as at Sunny Side she had come and gone as she pleased without thought of a chaperon. But the old lady was firm.

“I am responsible to Henry Middleton for you, Phoebe. It is quite different here, where you are not known. I hope after Christmas to be well enough to introduce you properly, and in the meantime I wish you to have singing lessons. My old friend, Herr Graff, is wintering here, and though he does not usually take pupils, I have asked him to take you. He is to come here this morning to see what you can do.”

Phoebe’s heart leaped within her at the prospect of the lessons, for to study vocal music was the thing that she had most wished to do in Melrose. With swift, warm impetuosity she kissed the old lady, who flushed faintly under the unaccustomed caress.

“Oh, Aunt Al,” she said, “how did you know that it was the thing of all others that I wished to do! And to think of taking from Herr Graff—it is too good to be true!”

In a few minutes the door-bell rang, and Isam, the old white-haired negro butler, ushered Herr Graff into the room where the ladies sat.

Phoebe felt herself grow hot, then cold, as Miss Allison quietly presented:

“My niece, Miss Middleton, Herr Graff.”

A tall, imposing-looking person, with drooping mustache and iron-gray hair, was bowing low before Phoebe. She noticed that he wore a number of royal decorations on the front of his closely-buttoned black coat. He turned deferentially to Miss Allison, and while they conversed Phoebe recovered her usual poise.

In a few moments Herr Graff turned to her, and, with another low bow, said:

“Fraulein, will she now sing?”

Phoebe rose at once and went to the piano.

“What shall I sing, Aunt Al?” she asked. Then she added, “I am afraid I don’t know anything but hymns.”

“Oh, well, sing a hymn, child. It does not matter; Herr Graff wishes only to hear your voice.”

Taking down a little book of Psalms and Hymns that she used in church, Phoebe turned the leaves aimlessly for a moment then, striking a few soft chords, commenced to sing, “I am far frae my hame an’ I’m weary oftenwhiles.”

She paused for an instant, but there was no sound in the room, so she went on, singing the stanzas of the sacred song.

As she sang thoughts of father and mother, brothers and home, swept over her, and the high,

clear, vibrant notes poured forth full of tenderness and feeling.

When she had finished, she turned eagerly toward Herr Graff to hear what he would say.

He sat perfectly still for a moment, and then his admiration burst forth. "Ach Gott!" he exclaimed impetuously, "ze Fraulein can sing. She haf a voice off goldt!" He rose and shook hands with both the ladies. Again and again he made her sing, each time appearing more delighted with "ze voice off goldt." It was soon decided that he was to give to Phoebe two lessons a week until her aunt was well enough to go out.

Then commenced a pleasant season for Phoebe. She always had enjoyed anything that made her entirely forget herself. She threw her whole soul into the music, and made such progress that she delighted her teacher.

However, during all these month's there was an undercurrent of sadness in the girl's heart for, since the note written from the western town, there had been no word from Al. The letters from home were brave and bright, but Phoebe's heart read between the lines. She knew that the terrible anxiety was crushing her father and mother. As Christmas came and went the strong hope that she had entertained that Al would write, or come, died out and she settled down once more to the deep undercurrent of pain.

During these months of wearing anxiety her reli-

gion became a vital and tender thing to her, and she was sustained and comforted. Each day she prayed earnestly for all the dear ones, but chiefly and most tenderly for Allison. And each time she rose from her knees comforted and serene, feeling sure that in God's good time all would yet be well.

CHAPTER II

A warm friendship sprang up between Phoebe and Eloise Murphy, the daughter of a dear friend of Miss Allison's. Eloise was a year younger than Phoebe, and was sweet and fair and plump. She was the opposite of Phoebe in many ways, and looked up to and worshiped her as only some very sweet natures can look up to and worship those whom they consider far above themselves in beauty and intelligence.

Now that Miss McClintock was better, she planned a series of pleasures for Phoebe, in which Eloise was always included. Thus, for the first time in her life, Phoebe was thrown intimately with a girl nearly her own age, and she enjoyed this friendship very much.

Miss McClintock gathered about her the choicest society in Melrose; and, by her beauty and grace, Phoebe soon won all hearts. Invitations to card parties, dances, musicales, concerts, dinners, and teas began to pour in, and for an hour or two each morning Phoebe was kept busy answering them, on some of the beautiful imported paper, stamped with Miss Allison's monogram, with which the beautiful old writing-desk was always well supplied.

Miss McClintock insisted that all questionable invitations be declined. But wherever Phoebe did go, and she went a great deal, she found herself the center of an admiring group, that lavished adulation and flattery upon her. In fact, had not Phoebe had a very level head on her young shoulders, she would have been in very great danger of having it completely turned. For "the little Puritan," as she was called, was undoubtedly the rage, and Aunt Allison's pride and pleasure in her knew no bounds.

Lent came, and, while they did not observe it in any way, Miss Allison and Phoebe were glad of a little quiet time to themselves. It was still a busy time for Phoebe, as she was working hard over her music, and was planning various new and inexpensive dresses.

Few of her many admirers knew that many of the pretty and stylish-looking garments in which she delighted Melrose society were made by her own slender, thrifty fingers.

Eloise was now kept at home by the illness of her mother, so Phoebe found herself thrown largely on her own resources. Time never hung heavy for her, however, as there was nearly always some one to walk or ride with, and Miss Allison had planned for her a great deal of reading, which she had not had time to do.

"Never fail to be well read, my child," the old lady had said to her on more than one occasion. "A pretty face may not always be yours, but a fine

brain is riches in itself." And Phoebe's quick mind responded with avidity.

Accordingly, Miss Allison had mapped out a course of reading for Phoebe, including history, poetry, biography and travel, and whenever opportunity offered she took her niece to a lecture or to a concert.

One blustering cold Sunday afternoon in early March as Phoebe came in from Sunday-school, where she had taken a class of little children, she was surprised to hear voices in the drawing-room. Knowing that her aunt's rules about visiting on Sunday were as the laws of the Medes and Persians and changed not, Phoebe could not repress a little girlish curiosity as to who the visitor could possibly be. She had just left Nat Murphy at the door. She was still smiling at his boyish nonsense and his comic look of distress when she told him she could neither walk to the river with him nor invite him in, because it was Sunday! How he would have groaned, if he had known that some one more fortunate than himself was safe inside, cozily chatting by the bright fire.

She was dressed simply, in a long dark brown coat and skirt, brown being a color very much in vogue. On her head she wore a close-fitting toque of brown velvet, trimmed with a bunch of pink roses at the side. Around her trim shoulders was a beautiful brown sealskin cape, belonging to her aunt, and she carried the muff to match. Where the cape

was brought together in front it was caught by a cluster of pink carnations, a flower which was just beginning to be imported to the south by a few enterprising florists.

As she was crossing the hall to go to her room her aunt called her to come into the drawing-room. She went immediately in, letting her long dress trail across the floor after her. The long, trailing, dark dress accentuated her extreme slenderness, while the spirited carriage of her head suggested the startled grace of a young fawn. Her cheeks and lips were glowing from exercise, and her eyes still wore the smiling light that Nat's parting nonsense had caused to shine in their clear depths.

Phoebe fully expected to see old Dr. Carmichael, but when she raised her eyes they encountered the admiring gaze of a pair of particularly fine blue ones that belonged to a distinguished-looking man that she had never seen before.

He caught his breath quickly as his eyes met hers, and for one instant their souls seemed to mingle, while Miss Allison was saying in her serene way:

“This is my niece, Miss Middleton, Mr. Hamilton. Phoebe, come and meet my old friend, Mr. Paul Hamilton.”

Phoebe, with a singular new tingling sensation that reached to her finger-tips, turned with a ready smile, and shook hands with the stranger. Then she made some light remark about his not looking his full age, if he were one of Aunt Al's oldest friends!

He picked up the ball of small talk and repartee, and they tossed it back and forth with laughter and jest, and with much innocent coquetry from Phoebe.

Finally, in despair, Miss McClintonck looked from one to the other and said: "What *are* you two talking about? I am sure neither of you know, for I can't make anything out of it."

Whereupon they both laughed like two gay children, and Phoebe rose to lay aside her wraps.

"Sing something for us, Phoebe, child," said the old lady, as the girl crossed the room to resume her seat.

One of Phoebe's charms lay in her being free from affectation. She went immediately to the piano, saying as she did so, "What shall I sing?"

"Sing that little hymn you sang for Herr Graff that first day he came. It begins, 'I am far frae my hame.' "

Phoebe sat down to the piano, and letting her hands wander over the keys in a soft prelude, she sang again the sweet simple hymn. As she sang she forgot the present. She thought of Clay and the touching sacrifice that he was preparing to make. She thought of Bruce with his sweet ways. She thought of Al, wandering somewhere in the far distant west—possibly in sin and want. She thought of her father and mother lonely and anxious and waiting at home. She thought of the Sunday afternoons when they had all gathered about the piano

while their mother played and their childish voices mingled with her clear soprano and their father's deep bass.

The sweet, clear liquid notes floated out like a chime of golden bells, while Phoebe, with rapt eyes, seemed to look straight into that other land. When she finished Paul Hamilton sat quite still. Something seemed to grip his throat. The words would not come.

Miss Allison cried out, "Phoebe, child, what on earth were you thinking of to make you look like that?" Phoebe turned, smiling, but answered a little tremulously. "I don't know why, but somehow I always think of Clay when I sing that."

Just then Isam brought in the tray with tea, and shortly afterward Paul Hamilton rose to take a reluctant leave. Phoebe had gone from the room for an instant to get something for her aunt. As Paul held the old lady's hand, in farewell, he leaned over and, looking searchingly into her eyes, said, "Miss Allison, *who is Clay?*"

CHAPTER III

"I wish your father hadn't named you Phoebe," fumed Miss Allison the next day. She was in a peevish mood and nothing quite suited her. "Who ever heard of naming a Christian child by such a heathenish name!"

Phoebe, too, had been restless and distract all morning. She could not imagine what ailed her, but at her aunt's fretful outburst, she laughed merrily and said:

"What have you against my name, Aunt Al? I used to think it was very ugly and unattractive, but I rather like it now. The boys used to tease me, and call me 'Fib,' and I remember once I cried. Then mother took me in her lap and told me I was named for father's mother, who died when he was a tiny little boy, and that Phoebe meant *pure* and *radiant*. I have never disliked the name since."

"Well, I had much rather they had named you Lois, or Alice, or Allison. I am sure they sound more Christian. Why didn't they name you Allison, after me?"

"But, Aunt Al, they named Allison after you," suggested Phoebe.

"I would like to know who wants a boy rampaging around the country named after one? I am very much displeased with Allison, so I have made a new will, and have left *you* what little I have."

Tears sprang to Phoebe's soft eyes, and she exclaimed:

"Oh, Aunt Al, indeed, indeed you must not! Al is a dear! He is all right, and I couldn't bear to have what rightfully belonged to him."

"Rightfully! Humph! I'd like to know if it is not permissible for me to do as I choose with my own? I have struggled all my life to take care of it, and I do not propose to leave it to anybody to waste," the old lady went on vigorously.

"I am sure Al will turn out all right, and I couldn't take what we have always thought would be his." Phoebe laid her hand tenderly on the old lady's wrinkled one, and looked at her aunt most beseechingly, but Miss McClintock remained firm.

"You need not try to dictate to me, child. Your kind feeling in this matter does you credit, but I have made up my mind."

She spoke with such an air of finality that Phoebe felt it was useless to discuss the matter further and sat looking gravely into the fire. Phoebe was silenced for the time being. But she had by no means given up. All her life people had done for her what she wished, so she could not think that Aunt Allison really meant to hold out against her.

Just then Eloise Murphy burst into the room.

Her sweet face was all aglow and she brought a breath of outdoors with her.

“Come, Phoeb!” she cried, “it is glorious out, and Nat says the arbutus is perfectly lovely on the hill by the bluff road.”

“Is Nat going with you, girls?” asked Miss Allison. “You know, Eloise, I don’t approve of your running around in the woods by yourselves. I don’t think it is quite safe.”

“Yes, Miss Allison, mother is well enough for us both to leave her this morning, and you know Nat doesn’t go to college on Monday. . . . Run, Phoeb, and get your hat. Nat said he would wait for us at Lampson’s.”

Phoebe quickly returned, in trim boots and walking-skirt, with a short red coat and a cap to match.

They all enjoyed the brisk walk in the crisp March air, and brought back great bunches of the sweet, delicate arbutus. Nat’s college slang and nonsense diverted Phoebe’s mind from all disturbing thought, and of the three she was the wildest and the merriest.

That afternoon, just before the time for lamps to be lighted, Miss Allison and Phoebe were sitting in the drawing-room by a cozy fire, which the late spring still rendered indispensable. There was an old-fashioned blue delft bowl of arbutus on the table, and its delicate fragrance filled the air. The ladies had laid aside their work, and were enjoying the deepening twilight. Phoebe had discarded

fashion, for the time, and had dressed her hair in a simple, girlish style that made her look almost childishly young, while the effect of youth was enhanced by her simple dress of soft white wool.

Thinking it too early for visitors, they were surprised to hear the front door close, and Isam's voice saying: "Yas, suh, Mass' Paul, dey's bof een dere. I'se powerful glad to see you, Mass' Paul, I sho' is."

The curtains at the drawing-room door were thrust back, and the old negro announced pompously:

"Mr. Paul Hamilton."

Paul came forward, his quick eyes taking in at a glance the pleasant home picture.

Phoebe for some inexplicable reason suddenly felt herself glow with color, and she was glad that the light was too dim for it to be seen. Somehow she felt very young and very happy, and was glad when Miss Allison invited Paul to stay to tea. To this proposal he acceded so readily that Phoebe strongly suspected that Aunt Allison had fallen into a trap, which this scheming young man had laid, and she could scarcely restrain a smile at his look of well-bred innocence.

Miss Allison always lived well but simply, and her table was always dainty with clean linen, bright silver and fresh flowers. To-night the centerpiece was a glass bowl filled with arbutus, white violets, and maiden-hair fern, which had been tastefully arranged by Phoebe's capable hands.

It seemed to Phoebe that the fried chicken had never had so fine a flavor, that the honey had never had a color so golden, that the waffles had never been so crisp and brown, as on this first evening that she and Paul sat down at the table together.

As for Paul, he hardly knew what to think of this merry child, who teased and coqueted even with severe Miss Allison. In a way, he thought her even more charming than the regal young creature he had met the afternoon before. He was very glad that he knew who *Clay* was.

Some mention was made of the flowers on the table, and Phoebe went into a spirited account of some incident of the walk, and mentioned Nat Murphy's name.

"Nat Murphy!" said Paul quickly, "why he is nothing but a child, is he?"

"He is a pretty big child then," said Phoebe, "for he is six feet two, and awfully good-looking!"

"Why, how old is he, Miss Allison?" asked Paul, turning to Miss McClintock, and feeling that hatred of Nat Murphy was taking possession of him.

Before the old lady could answer Phoebe spoke.

"He was nineteen on Christmas Day. I know, for I heard him bewailing the fact, and saying that he had been done out of something in having his birthday and Christmas come on the same day," and Phoebe laughed at the remembrance of his boyish chatter.

The meal being over, they returned to the draw-

ing-room, where Isam had replenished the fire and lighted candles. Hagar, Aunt Allison's cat, and her family of kittens had taken possession of the hearth rug in their absence, and the kittens were now comfortably having their supper before the warm fire. As Phoebe looked at their little soft warm bodies, and saw their little pink tongues drawing their nourishment, something shy and sweet seemed to stir within her; and, for the first time in her life, she cast her eyes down with sweet shame.

"Who in the world let the cat in here? Take her out, Phoebe, and tell Isam to put her in the barn," commanded Miss Allison.

Phoebe, glad of something to cover her unwonted confusion, gathered the kittens up in her arms. She made a lovely picture with the little things held close to her, but Hagar did not seem to appreciate it, for she stalked anxiously along making faint, quick calls to her babies.

Paul's glance followed the girl to the door. Then he turned and faced Miss Allison.

"Where have you kept her hidden all these years?" he asked.

The old lady smiled lovingly, and irrelevantly answered: "Take care, Paul; I warn you, for you know I love you too. Phoebe does not seem easy to win."

Their conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Herr Graff, who came in, reeking of

tobacco, but very elegant in appearance, and bowing with much ceremony.

He was the bearer of an invitation to Phoebe, which he was plainly desirous that she should accept.

She was asked to sing in Grace Episcopal Church on Easter Sunday. The leading soprano had been taken ill and her doctor had forbidden her to use her voice for several months, so Phoebe was asked to take her place at Easter.

“Easter!” said Miss Allison, “Easter indeed! Why can’t they ask the child to sing some other Sunday? They know I don’t keep Easter.”

“But I haff speak off ze voice! And dey haff vish to hear. De day, it do not matter. It iss de voice off goldt dat dey would hear.” Herr Graff looked anxiously at Miss Allison, and it was quite plain that he wished his pupil to sing.

Paul rose and said good-bye soon after. But when he went out into the frosty night he did not go home. He walked for a long time, thinking; and when he arrived at home he still was of the opinion that for once Miss McClintock was very remiss in letting a beautiful girl like Miss Middleton take lessons from an old German beer-keg like that, and in allowing her to run around the country with a scatter-brain like Nat Murphy.

CHAPTER IV

The two weeks before Easter sped swiftly by, and Phoebe did not see Paul Hamilton again until the day that she was to sing. Twice he called, but once she was spending the evening with the Murphys, and the next time she had gone to practice in the church.

The music that had been selected was an adaptation of a portion of Handel's most beautiful oratorio, "The Messiah," and Phoebe was to have the chief solo; she was also to sing in the "Hallelujah" chorus. It was hard work for the girl, but she liked it, and the Saturday evening that they met for the final practice she was conscious of doing her part well.

Easter morning dawned clear and beautiful, and, contrary to her custom, Miss Allison had insisted that Phoebe should lie in bed and keep her nerves quiet until time for the services. Phoebe had laughed gaily at the idea of her having nerves, but she was glad to stay in her room, for she felt that no one could sing such music as "The Messiah" without special spiritual preparation.

She lay quietly in bed until eight o'clock—that seemed very late to her. Then, throwing back the

cover, she ran to the window without even so much as putting on her slippers. She pushed open the shutters, and looked out on a sweet new world.

The trees were just beginning to show buddings of tender green, and each branch and twig wore an emerald crown. Down in the garden the walks were bordered with jonquils, while from the big magnolia at the end of the walk there was the busy chatter of a flock of jay-birds. She smiled as she listened, and then her face grew tender for they reminded her of home. She breathed the pure morning air for an instant, then, catching up her Bible, she made a flying leap and landed in the middle of the big bed. Snuggling down under the cover, for she must run no risk of catching cold to-day of all days, she opened her Bible and read again the wonderful and touching story of the trial and the crucifixion and the glorious resurrection of our Lord.

Her heart stirred within her, and a prayer of devotion and new consecration rose from the depths of her being.

She was lying very still with the little Bible slipped under her pillow, while her long dark lashes held two trembling tears that had risen in her access of devotion, when Miss Allison came softly in, bringing a cup of hot milk on a tray.

The old lady hesitated for an instant, thinking that the girl was still asleep, but Phoebe turned and opened her eyes. "Oh, Aunt Al," she cried, "the

idea of your bringing my milk yourself! Why didn't you make Isam set it outside my door?"

She sat up as she spoke, and tasted the milk. Then making a wry face, she exclaimed contemptuously: "Hot milk! I think Herr Graff must be crazy. Who does he think wants to make a breakfast off a cup of hot milk!"

Then, sniffing ecstatically, she added, "I smell hot rolls right now!"

"I don't see why some breakfast would hurt your voice, and I'll go straight down and send you up a tray, if you wish it," said Miss Allison. "I never heard before that one couldn't eat breakfast the day one sang in church."

Phoebe set the cup back in the tray and lay back among the pillows, smiling.

"That really isn't so bad," she said, "and I don't suppose I am really anywhere as near starving as I feel. But, Aunt Al, do tell Clarissa to have something extra good for dinner! I fancy that by that time I'll be ready for something substantial."

To Phoebe's surprise when she came down-stairs ready for church, the old lady was sitting with her bonnet on, reading the Bible.

"Why, Aunt Al, I thought you had gone," she said.

Miss Allison smiled faintly.

"Did you think I would let you go alone?" she asked.

"I did feel a little strange and frightened at the

thought," Phoebe admitted, "but I know you do not believe in observing Easter, so I didn't think you would care to go."

The carriage was waiting at the door; there was no time for further conversation, and Isam drove briskly to church.

When they arrived Eloise took charge of Miss McClintock, taking her into the pew with the Murphys. Paul Hamilton met Phoebe and walked by her side around to the choir-room.

"Why," she exclaimed in apparent surprise, "are you here? I thought you were a Presbyterian."

Paul parried, "I thought you were a Presbyterian, and *you* are here."

"Of course I am a Presbyterian, I am the bluest kind, deep 'dyed in the wool,'" laughed Phoebe, "but I came to sing."

"And I came to hear you," said Paul.

"But you shouldn't come to church for any such reason as that," said Phoebe gravely, and looking very innocent.

"Perhaps not," said Paul, "but that is why I came."

He looked at her gravely, straight in the eyes as he spoke. Phoebe turned quickly, and ran up the steps into the choir-room.

CHAPTER V

The church was filled to overflowing with the élite of Melrose that Easter morning, for, besides the fact that it was Easter Sunday, a whisper had gone abroad that Miss Middleton was going to sing. Few had ever heard her, as Herr Graff had insisted that she sing only at home during the winter months. Many knew the fair young girl though, and were curious to hear the voice that Herr Graff praised so extravagantly.

Phoebe, in chorister robes, came out with the choir and took her place, feeling a little anxious and lonely; but, as the beautiful ritual service progressed, she threw her heart into it, and soon all thought of self was lost.

Her lovely young face was angelic in its purity when the time for her solo arrived and she stepped forward in front of the choir. The plain close cap and the wide collar of the chorister's dress acted as a foil to bring out the spirituality of her expression and the beauty of her coloring. Her hair fell in soft waves over brow and neck, and her cheeks were flushed with warmth and excitement. Her breathing was gentle and regular, while her parted lips just disclosed the row of even, strong, white

teeth. Her eyes, velvety and serene, glanced over the congregation while the great organ was pealing forth the prelude.

Near the front, looking very anxious and warm, sat Herr Graff. In the Murphys' pew, on the right, she saw Aunt Al looking very belligerent at all this "Popery." Phoebe could hardly restrain a smile as her eyes rested on her aunt for an instant. Then far back near the door, she saw Paul Hamilton's clean-shaven face. His head, with his blond hair closely cut, stood out in bold relief against the dark paneling of the wall. A singular thrill, not altogether of pleasure, passed through her as she recognized him, and she dropped her eyes to the music that she held in her hand.

Then she commenced to sing. The notes a little tremulous at first, soon became steady, and poured forth like a molten stream of purest gold. Her eyes, seraphic in their look of devotion, gazed far above the heads of her listeners, and like Handel, seemed to see the "great God himself."

The jubilant notes, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," seemed to float away into paradise itself.

When she sat down she felt a strange spiritual elation, and she knew, from the breathless stillness around her, that she had sung, as she had prayed to sing, to the honor of her King. Again in the "Hallelujah" chorus, when the whole congregation rose, her clear, pure, young voice soared aloft, and

she felt almost as if she could float away in an ecstasy of song.

The great congregation dispersed slowly, lingering to express Easter greetings, and to comment upon the music.

"That little girl can *sing*," said Nat Murphy to Major Dalrymple as they passed down the aisle together.

The major, whose round, rosy face still beamed with the pleasure that Phoebe's singing had given to him, said:

"There is no doubt of that! Why, the child could make her fortune on the stage."

"Well, she'll hardly go there," said Nat, but the major interrupted him:

"O I know that! They tell me she is very strict, and that the little Puritan even has a vocation."

"A vocation! O come, Major!" said Clifford Dawson, who had joined the group, "you are a little mixed on your theology. Who ever heard of a Presbyterian having a vocation?"

The major, a shade pinker, if that were possible, joined in the laugh against himself, then said:

"I'll be bound, she has a vocation all the same, and I'll bet Nat knows what it is!" The major winked slyly at Nat, who colored up to his ears.

"Come, come, Major, that is not fair to try to turn the laugh on Nat. I believe in fair play," said Clifford.

The little group broke up, and Nat got out just in

time to see Paul hand Miss Allison and Phoebe into the carriage, and get in himself, and then Isam whipped up the horses and started off at a brisk pace.

"How perfectly insufferable Paul Hamilton has become," Nat thought. "He positively makes me ill he gives himself such airs since he came home from Massachusetts! . . . Besides, I don't think it is quite honest in Miss Allison to forbid us all to come there on Sunday, and then take him off, in the carriage with them, under our very eyes!"

CHAPTER VI

Late that afternoon Phoebe lay back in a great easy chair, resting. The day had exhausted her more than she would have thought possible.

“I never remember feeling so tired but once before,” she said, “and that was a time Clay and I walked six miles, in the broiling sun, to get water-lilies. When we got them home, they were all dead, and we nearly got a whipping for our pains!” She laughed softly at the remembrance.

“Well, Phoebe, I have been listening to your chatter for the last hour, and I have come to the conclusion that you are a sly puss.” Miss Allison spoke with some asperity.

Phoebe sat up suddenly as if she had been jerked, and looked mildly surprised. “Why, Aunt Al, what have I done!”

“What have you done! It is what you haven’t done that I am wondering over. You have known Paul Hamilton two whole weeks, and, so far as I have heard, his name has never passed your lips. Have you no curiosity about him, or is it that you are deep?”

Phoebe felt herself flush in a most provoking

way, under the old lady's questioning gaze. She decided to use candor as her best weapon of defense.

"To be perfectly truthful, Aunt Al, I have had a good deal of curiosity about him. I have wondered how he came to be so intimate here, and how you came to be so fond of him," she admitted.

"Then why haven't you asked me?"

"Oh, I don't know! Just because——" Phoebe held her slim hands between her face and the light, and examined them critically. Miss Allison watched her narrowly, but said nothing.

Presently the old lady burst out again: "I am not going to have you trying any of your tricks on him, Phoebe. He is like a son to me, and I would not have him hurt for anything in the world."

"You may set your mind at rest about him, Aunt Allison, so far as I am concerned. I certainly shall not molest him!" Phoebe rose with dignity as she spoke, and swept from the room.

The old lady sat dreamily looking into the fire, while once or twice a half smile passed over her face.

After a while Phoebe came back, all penitence for having been cross.

"I am so sorry I was rude, Aunt Al. Won't you forgive me, and show it by telling me all about your precious Paul?" She knelt on the rug at Miss Allison's feet, and looked comically beseeching.

The old lady patted the shining dark head lov-

ingly, and when Phoebe had settled herself comfortably with her back to the light, Miss Allison told her the story of Mr. Paul Davidge Hamilton.

Briefly set forth, it was as follows :

Mr. Paul Davidge Hamilton, the present Paul's father, was a wealthy planter in the lower part of the state. At the beginning of the war he owned much land and many slaves. He married Miss Mary Hughes, the daughter of Miss Allison's dearest friend, and as it was a pure love match it promised to be most happy. To this union was born one son, Paul Davidge. When the little fellow was less than two years old the war broke out, and Mr. Hamilton enlisted at once. Paul never remembered seeing him, for he was killed in the first battle in which he was engaged. The devoted wife was overcome at his loss, and when a little girl was born two months afterward her little limbs were shrivelled and she never walked.

The old home had been burned by raiders during the war, and the slaves were freed, so nothing was left but the land, and there was no one to cultivate that. In the course of a few years, where there had been fine open rice lands the fields had grown up in a thick underbrush of low-country shrubbery.

Mary Hamilton had lost her own mother, so during all the hard years of her early widowhood, and during the infancy of her frail little daughter, Miss Allison had been to her what only one loving woman can be to another.

Paul was sent up to Melrose to school, but he had not been able to go to college as his mother had felt the need of putting him to work as soon as possible. Miss Allison had used her influence, and had secured him a position in the office of the leading lawyer in Melrose. Here he read law, and showed such ability that he rapidly rose from one position of trust to another. The quality that counted for more than any other in his steady rise was his remarkable power of strict application to business.

A big syndicate, which was organizing cotton mills all through the south, had sent him to Massachusetts to study the subject, and he had returned to Melrose only a short time before his appearance at Miss McClintock's.

He was handsome and distinguished in appearance, and though still a young man, was recognized as the most promising business man of Melrose. Coupled with his genius for regularity and punctuality he had fine judgment, a high sense of honor, and was a member of the same church that Miss Allison belonged to.

Mrs. Hamilton and her crippled daughter lived in extreme retirement in a small cottage on the old plantation, and Paul did all that a loving heart but his as yet small means could suggest for their comfort and happiness. While at school, as a boy in Melrose, Miss Allison's house had been a home to him; and he had rewarded her interest and kind-

ness by giving her a love and confidence that was very rare between persons of their differing age and sex.

He had had the usual number of schoolboy flirtations, but of love and marriage he had never entertained an idea, that is, up to the time of his meeting Phoebe. Miss Allison was not so sure of what he had thought since.

The morning after this talk with Phoebe, Miss Allison had to go into the city on business, so Phoebe was left alone. She was rather glad of a quiet opportunity to write to Clay, however, so she got out her writing materials, and was just about to begin, when Isam ushered in Herr Graff. The old gentleman looked a little pale and excited, and Phoebe wondered vaguely if something had occurred to distress him. He was rather more deferential than usual, and commenced to praise her singing of the day before.

Phoebe showed her gratification in having pleased him by blushing most becomingly, when, to her amazement, he seized her hand and carried it to his lips.

“Ach Gott! Fraulein,” he exclaimed, “it iss de luff I haff for you!”

Phoebe greatly embarrassed, drew back, but he did not notice her uneasiness; he was intent upon his own destruction.

“Ze Fraulein, do she not understandt? I vould haff her for my wife.”

“Oh, Herr Graff!” she cried in pained astonishment, “I couldn’t, *indeed I couldn’t*, ever be anything to you but a most affectionate pupil. Please do not ever let us mention this again, for it is entirely out of the question.”

“But for why?” he insisted. “Ze Fraulein, she haff a voice of goldt. Vat she vould haff iss a career. She should sing before de Kaiser. She vould be receive at court. She vould be honor, she vould be great!”

She very firmly, but kindly, made him understand that she had no wish for a career, and that she could not marry any man that she did not love no matter what advantages he could offer to her; so he finally went away, and the next morning he left the city. In a note of farewell to Miss Allison, he sent affectionate regards to “my beloved pupil, the Fraulein,” and Miss Allison gave Phoebe the message without seeing the twinkle of amusement in the latter’s bright eyes.

CHAPTER VII

It was a perfect afternoon of the week after Easter. Phoebe and Paul were riding horseback up the river road. On the west was the broad shining river, lazily making its way to the sea; on the east was a tangle of wildwood. The spring had been particularly late, so all the early wild flowers were still in bloom, making the woods a bower of beauty. Snowy dogwood, crimson woodbine, pale pink honeysuckle, and delicate crab-apple blossoms studded the underbush, while far overhead wreaths of yellow jasmine threw a chime of golden incense to the breeze.

The riders had brought their horses to a walk, and were enjoying the sweet odors from the woods and the light breeze from the river. Phoebe had received a letter from her mother that had given a touch of wistfulness to her eyes and a note of sadness to her voice. Paul had never before seen her in this mood, and of all her various moods it was the most appealing. She had always seemed a child so bright and beautiful that she had no need of love; but this afternoon, she was, for the first time, a woman bearing her burden of sorrow and trying

to keep it hidden. His heart went out to her in deepest tenderness, and he longed to take her in his arms and shelter her from all pain. Whatever doubts he had had before were dispelled, and he knew that of all the world Phoebe Middleton was the woman for him.

He was gravely tremulous because of the intensity of his feeling, for to him it seemed a serious matter to ask a woman to be his wife. He had never been one to treat women lightly, and his thought of marriage was tender and sacred, reaching somewhere into the very innermost core of his being.

Phoebe, who had been looking at the river, turned suddenly in her saddle, and said :

“It is all very beautiful, isn’t it? I shall think often of this ride—when I am gone.”

“Gone! gone! Gone where?” Paul managed to stammer.

“I forgot that you didn’t know. Mother needs me, and I am going home next week. I have been feeling for some time that I should go, but it is hard to tear myself away. Everybody has been so good to me. I shall think of you always as a dear friend, Mr. Hamilton. You have been most kind, and I hope you will count me one of your friends.”

Phoebe smiled tremulously, and held out her smooth, ungloved hand as she spoke.

“Never, Phoebe!” Paul cried, and her name slipped out unnoticed. “The day has passed when

I could have been a friend of yours. I want much more than that! I want *you*. I know I am all unworthy, but I love you, Phoebe; and I want you for my wife."

He took off his hat and waited, with bared head, for her answer.

Phoebe, with all her girlish coquetry laid aside, looked softly and kindly at him, and said: "Oh, believe me, I am so sorry! But I don't think I ever wish to marry. It is so solemn. It frightens me. Just suppose we didn't hold out, how awful it would be."

"I am not afraid of not holding out," Paul said, "and I intend to make you love me, so help me God." He bowed his head as if taking an oath.

"O please, *please* do not!" cried Phoebe, a look of almost childish distress coming into her lovely eyes. "I don't wish to love anybody. Indeed, indeed, I do not. Won't you just be my friend?"

Paul looked at her and had to smile, though he was so disturbed. She looked so young and so very troubled.

"I can't be your friend, Phoebe, but at least I promise that I will not distress you. I wish you to remember that I love you, and that I will not change. Each day I wish you to say to yourself: 'Paul loves me. He wants me for his wife.' Won't you promise that much, Phoebe? If I can make you love me, won't you be my wife?"

Paul's voice was full of tender pleading, and the hand that he laid on Phoebe's felt warm and strong.

Again she felt that singular thrill pass through her as it had done on Easter Sunday when she caught sight of his face in the back of the church. Only this time the thrill was stronger and more insistent. She felt her face flame rosy red, and she could not meet his beseeching eyes.

A sudden sweet ecstacy filled Paul's heart, and he knew that he had only tried to pluck the fruit too soon. Releasing her hand, he said gently: "Never mind, little girl. I'll wait."

Then they rode slowly home through the gathering twilight, and she told him of her mother's letter and of Allison: how during all these months they had had no news of the boy, and how her mother's heart was sick with hope deferred.

CHAPTER VIII

A year and a half sped swiftly by, and Phoebe, except for a short visit now and then, had been no more to Melrose. She had found that Mrs. Middleton needed her, and the tender heart of the girl reproached her that she had stayed away so long.

The look of patient suffering in her mother's eyes had touched her inexpressibly, and she made up her mind that she would not leave her again, at least not until Bruce should be at home.

Miss Allison had been unusually well during these months, and had spent the greater part of one winter at Sunny Side. Phoebe had used all her powers of persuasion to get the old lady to reinstate Allison in her will; but, for once, she had to own herself beaten. Miss Allison remained obdurate.

All these quiet months had been full of sweetness to the girl, for she felt that she was doing her duty. However, she no longer deceived her own heart: she knew that she loved Paul Hamilton. Nevertheless she would not hear of an engagement; at least not while Dr. and Mrs. Middleton needed her so much.

“It is no use talking, Paul,” she said on one occa-

sion, "I cannot leave them now, and I do not believe in long, indefinite engagements. So we will not be bound."

"I do not mind being bound," he had answered. "In fact it is the thing I most long to be. The tighter the better so far as I am concerned. O Phoebe, darling! I love you so! Won't you at least tell me that you care?"

And Phoebe had answered, "If it is any comfort to you to know it, I do care very much." And for a delicious, fleeting instant she had laid her soft, cool cheek against his. With this he had been forced to be content.

Bruce was near the end of his course at college, and Clay would soon graduate at the seminary. Bruce would finish in March and Clay in May. Then Bruce would bring home the sweet girl who had promised to be his wife; and in October Clay, forsaking all, would go to that far distant land, where he was called to minister.

Shortly after Christmas Miss Allison sent for Phoebe. She was not well, she wrote.

So Phoebe went up to Melrose. It had been a very hard winter: for weeks the snow had lain on the ground, and the river was frozen over. Phoebe had never known it to be so cold, and she enjoyed the coasting and sleighing as only those can that have never before known those pleasures. Major Dalrymple, Clifford Dawson, and Nat Murphy vied with one another in contributing to her pleas-

ure. Each of them had in his own way told her of his love, and had gone away hopeless, but it was for Nat that she felt most concerned.

Dear, merry Nat, when he told her of his love, looked at her pleadingly and said: "You have been an angel to me, Phoeb, ever since I was a kid! I just can't give you up. You have always been so sweet to me that I felt sure you would marry me when I was old enough."

Phoebe could not resist a smile at this naive admission, but she said gently: "I will always love you, Nat, but not in the way you mean, so let us forget all about it, and be chums as we have always been."

The boy's eyes filled with tears, but he took her proffered hand, and soon after rose to leave. When he got to the door he came back and Phoebe saw that there was something else that he wished to say.

"What is it, Nat?" she asked kindly.

"Phoeb," he said, "don't tell Eloise. She kids me so!"

Phoebe, with a perfectly grave face, promised not to tell, but when he was gone she could not restrain a merry laugh at his expense. He was such a boy!

Paul spent many of his evenings with Phoebe and Miss McClintock, but he was always busy during the daylight hours, so Phoebe was surprised one morning to get a note from him asking her to go sleigh-riding with him that afternoon.

They rode again over the river road, the same that

they had ridden over that sweet spring afternoon nearly two years before.

The queer impromptu sleigh was made comfortable with rugs and hot bricks, and Phoebe, in a long dark coat and crimson muffler and hat, looked adorable. There was a new, sweet softness and a fullness of content about her face that Paul had never seen before, and his heart sang within him, for at last he knew that he was to obtain his heart's desire. He drove by devious windings through the snowbound woods, and many rabbits, frightened and cold, sat up and viewed their strange progress with wide, startled eyes. The tall pines stood sentinel over all, while in the underbrush holly, glistening with red berries, and clumps of sombre cedar made patches of color against the dazzling background of snow.

Finally they came to the river road, and Paul pulled his horse down to a walk. Phoebe's heart beat a little thickly, and she felt suddenly frightened and longed to run away.

In order to cover her confusion she talked very fast about nothing in particular.

Paul listened in silence, which at last grew embarrassing, and Phoebe glanced covertly to see his face. She saw that he was looking ill, and that his face was drawn and white.

Her heart smote her and she half opened her lips to speak, but he stopped her. His voice was hoarse

with emotion, and she could see his pulses leaping at his temples.

“I have brought you here, Phoebe, because I love you, and I want you for my wife. Child, child, you do not know! This agony is killing me! I can’t wait any longer. O Phoebe, tell me that you love me and that you will be my wife.”

Phoebe, all her maidenly reserve swept from her by his passionate tenderness, turned and kissed him softly on the lips.

“Now you know,” she said gently.

But even that did not satisfy him. He wished to hear her say the words, so looking sweetly into his eyes, she said, “I love you, Paul, and I will be your wife.”

Just then the sun came from behind a cloud and flooded the whole glistening world with radiance.

“It is an omen!” cried Paul, and it was well that the horse was tried and gentle, for he received very little attention during the remainder of that ride.

CHAPTER IX

Miss Allison's delight was unbounded when Phoebe and Paul, hand in hand and making a great show of rustic bashfulness, came in and craved her blessing. Neither of them had ever said anything to her, but she had made a shrewd guess as to how matters stood between them, and had forborne to question. Now that all had come right her pleasure in their happiness was beautiful to see.

She agreed with Paul in urging an early wedding, so Phoebe promised that if Dr. and Mrs. Middleton were willing she would marry him early in October. Paul begged for an earlier date than that. To him October seemed very far away. But Phoebe urged that it would be Clay's last summer at home, and she must be with him; so Paul had to yield the point, much against his wishes.

It was settled that he would go down to Sunny Side with Phoebe the next day and obtain Dr. and Mrs. Middleton's consent to their plans. Phoebe would not telegraph, as she knew that a telegram would alarm her mother, who was already not strong; but Paul, she said, could easily hire a horse in King's Quarter and ride over to Sunny Side.

Phoebe and Paul went to King's Quarter together, and Dr. Middleton met them.

Phoebe went home with her father, in the buggy, as she wished to speak to him and to her mother before Paul should arrive. So having cautioned Paul to bring the mail when he came over, she left him in King's Quarter.

Late that afternoon, when Paul arrived at Sunny Side, he could see through the open window the cheerful glow of an open fire. In the corner, shading her face from the light, sat Mrs. Middleton, her form thinner and her hair grayer than he had remembered them. In front of the fire, with Bluff's head on his knee, sat the doctor, resting, his head thrown back and his eyes closed. At the piano, dressed in a dress of soft white wool, sat Phoebe. Her hands were touching the keys lovingly and her face had that sweet far-away expression that he had seen the first day that he met her.

As he paused for an instant, looking in, he could hear the sweet, pure voice singing softly:

“Like a bairn to its mither, a wee birdie to its nest,
“I wad fain be gangin’ noo, until my Saviour’s breast,
“For he gathers in his bosom witless, worthless lambs
 like me,
“And he’ carries them himsel’ to his ain countrie.”

Paul felt the same thing grip his throat that he had felt that Sunday afternoon long ago, and he knew then that he had loved her from the first.

As he looked into the peaceful room, he seemed to understand for the first time the enormity that he was committing in demanding of these parents their lovely young daughter. "God help me," he thought, "they shall never regret it. Never!"

He raised his hand to the knocker. Phoebe ran out in sweet, informal fashion to meet him, and taking him by the hand led him in to her father and mother.

Later in the evening, as they all sat around the fire, Phoebe suddenly remembered the mail. Yes, there was one letter for Dr. Middleton, and Paul, apologizing for his remissness, handed it to him.

They were all startled a moment later to hear the doctor make a gasping sound, and Phoebe reached his side just in time to save him from falling.

"Oh, Henry, what is it!" Mrs. Middleton cried. "Is it news from Al?"

Phoebe had laid the doctor back in the big easy chair and was fanning him anxiously. Paul picked the letter up from where it had fallen on the floor. It was dated from El Paso, February 3, and ran as follows:

MY DEAR DR. MIDDLETON:

I am a nurse in the Presbyterian Mission Hospital at this place, and I am writing you at the request of one of our patients.

He is a young fellow about twenty years of age, and says he is your son, and that his name is Allison McClintock Middleton. Truth compels me to add that he is in a very

bad way, having been badly injured in a wreck, and I doubt if he is still living when this reaches you. I wished to telegraph, but he said it would frighten his mother, and that he preferred that I should write. Believe me, we will do all in our power to minister to him, both physically and spiritually; and, having prepared the way by letter, will telegraph you when any change occurs. I hardly think it possible that he will live until you could get here, so will not advise you to come.

Again extending my sympathy and assurance that everything possible will be done to make him comfortable, I am,

Yours in the faith,

MARJORIE McDONALD.

Sad as were the tidings, they all felt that even the certainty of Al's accident was easier to bear than the dread under which they had lived for so long.

The greater part of the night was spent in hurried consultation and preparation, and Dr. and Mrs. Middleton gave evidence of the sustaining power of the faith that they professed. There was no outcry, but each did the thing that was to be done.

It was decided that Dr. Middleton, Bruce, and Paul should go, while Clay should come home to be with Mrs. Middleton and Phoebe.

Telegrams to the boys, and a special delivery letter to Miss McClintock, completed the night's work; and, when morning came, Dr. Middleton and Paul were far on their way to Melrose, where they were to be joined by Bruce.

So far there had been no telegram, and that comforted them a little.

One sweet thought kept whispering at Phoebe's heart, during all the days of suspense and pain that followed, and that was that her Paul had been a comfort to her father, and that already she saw that Dr. Middleton leaned on him as on a son.

The rest is soon told. Al lived until his father reached him, and then died with his bright head on the old doctor's breast.

"Tell mother," he said, "that I never forgot her, and that I found that Friend she used to tell me about, and I am not afraid."

"And, father," he said, after a little, "tell Phoeb that for her sake I never mistreated any woman. She was so square, Phoeb was."

He did not speak again, and just at sunset the young life went out on the wide sea of eternity.

It seemed that when he first reached El Paso, he failed somehow to meet McGuire. He was practically without money, and was too proud to write home, so things went from bad to worse with him, and he was reduced to the direst straits. He had plenty of pluck, but he was a tenderfoot, and he would not do a dishonorable thing, so it was hard for him to find work that he would do.

Finally, though, he had obtained a permanent position as fireman on one of the great freight lines, and was writing to tell his mother when the crash came. He was horribly mangled, but his bright young head and his face, grown pathetically old, were not disfigured.

They brought him home, and laid him under the oaks in the old churchyard.

Mrs. Middleton never recovered from his death, and before the late roses bloomed she, too, had gone to rest.

So in October, when Phoebe was married only Aunt Allison and Eloise came to the wedding, and it was a very sad Phoebe, in her plain white wedding dress, who laid her flowers on two new graves, over one of which the grass had not yet grown green. And it was a very tender Clay whose voice pronounced Paul and Phoebe husband and wife.

Bruce had brought his young bride home in June, and Dr. Middleton was to live with them at the old home. Clay was to spend a few days with Phoebe in her new home in Melrose, and then he was to leave for his island home in the great Pacific.

BOOK III

THE NEW NEST

Yet Ah, that Spring should vanish with the Rose!
That Youth's sweet-scented manuscript should close!

The Nightingale that in the branches sang,
Whence, and whither flown again, who knows?

—*Omar Khayyám.*

CHAPTER I

Five years have passed. Paul and Phoebe, in their tiny house with its wide garden, had been happier than usually falls to the lot of mortals. At first, after Clay left and the long strain to appear brave was over, Phoebe had given way to her grief. It had been hard for Paul to see her suffer when he could not help her, but he had wisely let her alone. He knew that with her training she would not long give way to useless repining, but that she would soon be casting about to see what her hands could find to do.

They had brought Hester, Mammy Linda's daughter, with them from Sunny Side, and it was not long before Phoebe, with a chastened look of sorrow on her sweet face and a little plaintive note of sadness in her voice, was taking an interest in house and garden. Away down under the pear trees at the back she and Hester even started a hive of bees.

"You see, Paul enjoys honey so much," she said, half apologetically, when Eloise rallied her about having a farm.

What Paul liked and what Paul thought were subjects often on her tongue in those days.

The first year passed swiftly by, with happy busy hours in house and garden, and with sweet cozy evenings with Paul. They read together and talked of what they read; and then for the last thing Paul would always make her sing for him. He would tell her how beautiful she was and how much he loved her, and Phoebe's heart sang within her.

There were one or two short visits to Sunny Side, and Dr. Middleton and Bruce and Annie came up to spend the first Christmas in the dear little new home. They had a famous family dining on Christmas Day, at which Aunt Al was the guest of honor, and many were the hearts that were gladdened by some simple remembrance from Phoebe and Paul. It was always Phoebe and Paul in those days.

As the spring came on Phoebe found a sweet new interest in life, and before the holly berries had reddened for another Christmas her babies were born. Twin boys! Fine and sturdy and strong.

She could never forget the gladness of Paul's face when he came to her, nor the sweetness and peace of the first Sunday after the babies were born. Paul stayed with her all that day, and with clasped hands and bowed heads, out of their deep thankfulness they had repeated together the beautiful psalm, beginning, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name."

Dr. Middleton had come up on a visit, and his pride and joy in the babies knew no bounds.

Phoebe had lost some of her girlish slimness, and

had the fully developed bust and the broad hips that bespoke the crown of motherhood. Some persons even said that she had lost her elegant figure, but she only smiled, well content, and pirouetted about the room singing and shaking her head at her babies, while they stared at her with superhuman intelligence, but said never a word.

Paul was more tender and devoted than ever, and sometimes clasping Phoebe in his arms, he would strain her to his heart and say, "O Phoebe, darling, you are so sweet, and I am so happy!"

Phoebe had been reared in an old-fashioned school, and she preferred to take care of her babies herself during the night; besides, Mammy Linda was getting old now, and had to be considered. Phoebe had two little white cribs put in the airy sleeping-room by the pretty brass beds, and she and Paul each took care of a baby. She contrived the ingenious plan of exchanging the babies each night, "So that they will love us exactly even," she laughingly said.

However, there *were* times when things were not so very pleasant, for sometimes the boys behaved as if they had not had the advantage of either family or of training. As old Dr. Carmichael expressed it, "They simply raised Cain."

They were good babies on the whole, though, and very healthily. They had fine sturdy limbs, and looked exactly alike; both had rich auburn hair and brown eyes.

A little carriage for two! Two little tubs! Two little rattles exactly alike! Then a little later two little shovels and pails, two little drums, two little soldier suits! Ah, those were happy days!

The day of all days during their babyhood that stood out most clearly in Phoebe's memory was the mild spring Sunday when the babies were baptized.

Dr. Middleton came up for the occasion. Eloise left her church for the day, and stayed with Mammy Linda and the babies, and saw that each of them was looking his best.

Of course, Miss Allison was there, covering her tender old heart with a very severe and puritanical expression of face.

When that part of the service where infants are presented for baptism arrived, the whole great congregation stood and sang:

“From all that dwell below the skies,
“Let the Creator's praise arise;
“Let the Redeemer's praise be sung,
“Through every land, by every tongue.”

In the solemn hush that followed, Dr. Middleton, bearing Henry Clay Middleton, and Paul, looking gravely happy and carrying little Paul Davidge, walked up the middle aisle to the pulpit. Phoebe, a little tremulous and pale, walked behind with Mammy Linda.

In a few moments the solemn vows were taken, and the beautiful prayer offered, in which the white-

haired pastor prayed that the babies would grow in beauty of person and character, and increase in favor with God and man. Then the babies, Paul sucking a fat thumb, and Clay with one little hand on Dr. Middleton's cheek, were borne out, and so was concluded a most beautiful and touching scene. Phoebe's sweet face showing that like that mother of old she kept and pondered these thoughts in her heart.

The first five years had slipped by, and the boys had now reached their fourth year. It was Phoebe's pride and joy to take them out with her, and the beautiful woman with the two handsome boys was a charming sight to see. She had them with her almost every hour of the day, and their quaint, bright speeches were a constant source of delight to her.

Paul was working very hard, for their expenses had of course almost doubled. They were having some trouble at the mills, too, and they had to cut down expenses there, so Paul was doing double duty. He was even having to work in the evenings most of the time, and to Phoebe's loving eyes was looking worn and ill.

CHAPTER II

During the first two years of her married life Phoebe had been in mourning, and then the boys had come and claimed all her time, so she had not mingled with the social circles of Melrose. Now, however, the boys were old enough for Mammy Linda and Hester to manage them nicely and she had commenced at Paul's urgent request to take her proper place in society.

A rather gay society life had sprung up in Melrose during the years since Phoebe had visited there, and among the people composing this set she found herself quite a stranger. As soon, however, as it became known that the beautiful Mrs. Hamilton was beginning to go out again this set received her most cordially into its midst. Invitations to teas, receptions, clubs, and card parties came thick and fast, and Phoebe was kept busy looking after clothes and making suitable response to the many invitations.

She went everywhere, and even tried the card parties, for she had broadened in her views, and no longer held that the mere playing of a game of cards was a sin.

For one whole winter she had called on people in whom she had no interest, and with whom she had nothing in common. She had rushed frantically to catch cars in order to go to parties that she did not care for; and she had strained Paul's patience and his purse by having to get clothes to wear to entertainments, when they both would much have preferred to stay at home and romp with the babies or have a cozy, quiet evening together. For Paul's evenings at home were becoming increasingly few.

To a woman reared as Phoebe had been—to a woman who had looked on the still faces of her dead—such a life was impossible. All her life she had been taught that "man's chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy him forever," and she could not feel that she lived up to this high calling when she no longer had time for, or took pleasure in, reading her Bible or going to church. Her babies had to be left almost entirely to the care of servants, and she hardly ever saw Paul, except during a hasty breakfast, which he ate with his paper before him, hurrying to catch a car. Such was the state of affairs when on the Sunday afternoon of which I write, she and Paul took the boys for a walk down the dear old river road.

They were nearing home, and little Paul and Clay were running ahead, Paul as usual leading and Clay following exactly in his footsteps.

"I have made up my mind to one thing," said

Phoebe, "I am not going to attempt to go into society another winter."

"Why have you reached that conclusion?" asked Paul, smiling. "I thought you seemed to be having rather a good time. Every time I go on the street somebody compliments me on my beautiful wife, or repeats something witty she has said, or tells me she sings like an angel or something of the sort. Really, I quite feel as if I shine in your reflected glory."

Paul looked teasingly at her. Phoebe tried hard not to smile, but the dimples would come. She was only a woman after all.

"You are laughing at me," she said, "but I am quite in earnest. I think I must have something primitive in my nature, for the life of a society woman bores me. The club women are so important they think that they are settling the affairs of the universe. The scandal at the teas and the inane chatter over clothes and refreshments at the card parties positively nauseate me."

Paul laughed. "Aren't you putting it pretty strong?" he asked.

"No, I'm *not!* I just wish you could hear them. You would wonder how I have stood it this long. I am not a child, nor a fool! I'm a woman!"

Paul laughed with delight.

"I just wish some of them could hear you," he said. "Wouldn't they tear *you* to pieces the next time that they meet? I knew you were going it

pretty strong, and that the probabilities were that you would get enough, but *you* seem to have gotten an overdose."

"I suspect I do sound ungrateful," she said, "for people have been awfully nice to me, but I would rather be sentenced to penal servitude than feel that I had to live all my life as I have lived for the past year. Yet some people seem to like it. I heard old Mrs. Bland, who is seventy years old if she is a day, say with the pleasure of a girl of fifteen that Eloise's was the third function that she had attended that day. Imagine Aunt Allison tearing around from one party to another. Three a day. And hunting up something different to wear to each one!" Phoebe's scorn was unbounded.

"Well, I flatter myself that I have a fairly good imagination, but I confess I am not equal to that stretch," laughed Paul. "But look here, girlie," he added thoughtfully, "you mustn't become strong-minded. Womanliness, after all, is a woman's chief charm." He laid his hand gently on her arm.

"I know what you mean," she answered softly, "and of course I wouldn't talk so violently to anybody but you. But, do you know, I don't see why retailing unkind things about one's neighbors, or twaddling ceaselessly about clothes or what people have to eat, necessarily makes a woman womanly. I can think of a number of charming people that I would like to know well and to have in our home. And I know of delightful ways to spend our time, if

I only had *you* at home too. But you usually are so tired, or you can't come at all, and of course, I couldn't and wouldn't have people here without you." Phoebe spoke regretfully.

"Never mind, sweetheart, next winter you can start your parties, warranted to be uplifting and congenial, and I'll be with you every time," and Paul pinched his wife's pretty chin, and kissed her softly on the lips as he closed the door, for they had reached home, and had run up the steps, hand in hand, girl and boy fashion.

CHAPTER III

But the next winter Paul was busier than ever. The mills were still having trouble, and he was working every day and all day and often even into the night to get them into good condition. As fast as one item demanding his time and attention was disposed of something else would come up, and Phoebe saw practically nothing of him. Her wifely pride in him was touched, but her woman's heart was lonely.

She could have filled her home with the most charming people in the city. Her beauty and charm and her delightful voice made her a welcome addition to the most exclusive circle, even regardless of the fact that she and Paul belonged to two of the oldest and best families in the state. Her pride rebelled, however, and a strong sense of wifely propriety would not admit of her filling Paul's home with guests when she never knew if he could be there to receive them.

During the years that she had done nothing else outside of her home she had done a good deal of church work. In a large city church, however, and with very limited means, she felt that she could not

presume to lead those that plainly were of so much more importance than herself. The struggle for prominence among those that *did* lead disgusted her, so that she was content to work very quietly, even at the risk of being misunderstood.

She also was interested to some extent in public matters, and was of the greatest assistance to Paul in ameliorating the conditions of the women and children that worked in the mills. She gave to the subject time and thought and found out the conditions that surrounded their work in other sections. In this old-fashioned community, however, women were not supposed nor desired to take any prominent part even in much needed reforms. One phase of work that she thoroughly enjoyed was among the poor in the mill villages. She was known and beloved by young and old among them, and many a sad and weary soul, many a sick and dying one, was helped and cheered by her gentle ministrations. The only thing that prevented her and the little boys from spending a great deal of their time in this way was the lack of means.

Paul was working very hard and straining every nerve to provide a competency for his family and his investments were good; still they had to exercise the strictest economy in their expenditures, and Phoebe had to deny herself the great pleasure of giving.

She sang in the choir, and she and Paul both taught in the Sunday-school, and she gave a great

deal of time to the care of her boys. Still there were very many times when she was lonely. Make as many interests for herself as she could outside there were often times when she had to be in her home, and whenever she was there she missed Paul. She missed her father's petting and her mother's gentle companionship, she missed Bruce's sweet ways, she missed Clay's devotion, she missed Al's bright nonsense!

About this time golf commenced to be played in the south; and Phoebe always vigorous and active, took to it at once. It was a charming sight to see her and her two beautiful boys going across the links together, and many were the admiring glances cast her way by the male golfers. Many were the merry golf parties that she could have joined, had not her pride and her loyalty forbidden her going into a mixed company of which her husband was not a member, nor even an invited guest. Her marriage vows were sacred to her, and she always carried herself with a sweet dignity that kept men at a distance.

Since her boys had been four years old the cry of her heart had been for a little daughter, but no other child ever came to her.

“Oh, Eloise,” she said once to Eloise, who had married Clifford Dawson three years before and had a fair little golden-haired girl very like herself, “I would give anything if she were mine. I long so for a baby girl all my very own! The boys are getting

so big now, and insist on bringing frogs into the house. And they just *will* play baseball, and they get so soiled and smelly." Phoebe turned up her pretty nose in affected disdain, but Eloise laughed merrily.

"What a picture!" she cried, "I don't wonder you would like a dear, dainty little daughter to help you counterbalance that."

"The only thing that helps to reconcile me," laughed Phoebe, "is that she wouldn't be dainty if she were my daughter. She would keep up with her brothers, or she would die in the attempt."

The boys really were getting very big, and were out almost all day, and Phoebe was more and more lonely as the years went by. Paul was with her less and less as the business at the mills increased; and when he did occasionally spend an evening with her he was too tired to talk, and generally sat with closed eyes, far back in an easy chair, resting—except when answering repeated calls at the telephone. He was completely immersed in business, and except on Sundays, when they went to church together if he were not too tired to go, she never went out with him at all.

Phoebe did enjoy golf immensely, though, and she took great pride in being the champion woman golfer of Melrose. This was to be a short-lived pleasure, however. One day as she was returning on the car from the links, she sat behind two men that she did not know. She was immediately

behind, so could not help hearing what they were saying.

"By the way," said one, "was the handsome woman we saw at the links Paul Hamilton's wife?"

"Yes," said the other, "and it is perfectly shameful the way he neglects her."

"You don't mean——?"

"Oh, no, he's all right; but if he cares anything about her, he certainly does not show it. You would think a man would care for a handsome woman like that, too, but he doesn't. He's all for business!"

Phoebe rose and left the car at the next corner, her cheeks aflame, and after that she went no more to the golf links.

She wondered sometimes that she did feel so absolutely sure of Paul's love and fidelity, since he was away from her so much. Her faith in him, however, was perfect, and the thought of his love during all these lonely years was her greatest comfort next to her faith in God.

Many times she took the boys down to see their Grandmother Hamilton and their fair and gentle Aunt Sybil, who had never walked. They were a little frightened at her at first, because she was so fair and fragile, and they looked at her with great, solemn, wondering brown eyes. They soon learned to adore her, however, for she could tell excellent stories.

Often, too, they went to Sunny Side, and these

visits to the country delighted Phoebe almost as much as they did the boys, and she entered into their pleasure like one of themselves.

“Oh, mother,” said little Paul one day, “you must have had an awfully good time when you were a little boy. You know how to play such good plays,” and the little fellow threw his arms around her neck, and covered her face with warm kisses.

Then Clay climbed up, in a burst of emotion, and cried, “Me, too, mother, me too!”

Then Phoebe took them in the big chair, where there was room enough for all three, and in the soft glow of the firelight told them of their Uncles Bruce and Clay: and then so tenderly of their young Uncle Al, who died in that far-away, strange time before their father and mother were married.

Two or three times she and Paul had slipped away for a little change and rest, leaving the boys with Aunt Allison, who, against all reason, idolized them, and let them do exactly as they pleased. Once they went to New York for a season in Wagnerian grand opera, and had enjoyed it as only those can that lead an abstemious and quiet life.

During these little trips away Paul was all that heart could wish, tender and devoted. They would come back home determined to be more together, but business, that mighty Octopus, invariably forced them apart.

So the years rolled by.

Dr. Middleton had passed quietly and painlessly

into the great beyond. One morning he did not come down as usual, and when they went to call him, he lay quite still with a look of great peace on his worn old face. This was another great grief to Phoebe, and it was hard for her to be comforted; but she was beginning to learn the lesson of life now, and she knew that for him it was far better.

Then dear Aunt Allison was taken ill and passed away. Phoebe nursed her like a tender daughter during her brief, but painful illness, and it was Phoebe's loving hand that did the last sacred things for her, and that smoothed the snowy hair above the serene old face that seemed to shine with a radiance not of earth.

Her last words were: "Phoebe, child, you have been so good to me. I will tell Alice and Henry to-night."

Then she said, "Sing," and while the sweet voice, all tremulous with feeling, sang, "So I'm watchin' aye and singin' o' my home as I wait," she slipped away to her Father's house.

Miss McClintock's death made a great change in Paul and Phoebe's fortune, for she left everything, including her beautiful old home and all her library of charming books, to Phoebe.

Bruce had sent them all the old books that had belonged to Dr. Middleton's father, and, with their own small but well chosen library, Phoebe and Paul had an unusually large collection of books. Paul wrote to Boston and asked a friend of his

there to send him a man to classify and catalogue them.

All that winter after they moved from the dear little house where they had lived for fourteen years, Phoebe sat alone, or quietly while Paul worked or rested; and she read and read and read, or thought and thought and thought.

She was a woman no longer young, but still remarkably beautiful in her midsummer ripeness. She thought of no possible change in her condition, and if any change had been suggested to her, she would have said that she was quite happy. She still had red blood in her veins, however, and she was deadly dull. She was a fine, beautiful, cultured woman, but many of her splendid capabilities were lying fallow.

BOOK IV

THE STRANGE BIRD

The Moving Finger writes ; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
 Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.

—*Omar Khayyám.*

CHAPTER I

Miss McClintock's fine old place, Maplewood, was on the outskirts of Melrose, and combined the advantages of country and city. The boys enjoyed the life there very much. On their eighth birthday Miss Allison had given to each of them a pony, and they had become expert riders.

They greatly enjoyed swimming in the large pool at the back of the garden. It was always shady and cool there, even when the sun was shining hottest. A hedge of oleanders made the spot private. Phoebe had had a rustic seat built nearby, and she often sat there with a book, or with her work when it was warm elsewhere. She had always insisted that the boys spend a large part of each day in the open air. She never had been willing for them to have guns, however, though they had pleaded most earnestly.

“O mother, *please!*” said Paul.

“O mother, *darling*, *please!*” said Clay.

“We are fourteen now, and awfully strong,” they said.

“We are big and strong enough to be trusted with guns,” said Paul.

“Feel our muscle!” cried Clay, and they each presented a firm young arm held taut for her to feel.

She professed gratification and amazement at their Samson-like development, and thus mollified it was easier for them to bear her decision.

"No, boys, I am not willing for you to have guns. Guns are to kill with, and I don't want you to learn to love killing. I wish you to learn to help every feeble creature on God's earth."

Instead, she encouraged them to have a perfect menagerie of pets of all kinds.

The family had been settled at Maplewood for nearly a year. It was again Sunday afternoon early in May, and the garden below and the sky above vied with each other in beauty. Phoebe and Paul were sitting on the rustic seat, talking. The two boys had been playing with two frisky young Irish setters, and had run and laughed so much that Phoebe felt that the proprieties were involved, and had sent them to read to Mammy Linda, for the poor old woman was helpless and quite blind. She lived with Hester and William in a little house near the stable. Phoebe was looking almost girlishly young. Her hair, turning slightly gray, was arranged in the prevailing mode, with many soft puffs, and she wore a dress of soft pale muslin. She had lost her girlish slimness, but she did not look coarse nor overblown. Her coloring was still delicate, and the expression of her soft dark eyes and of the firm, yet gentle, mouth was gravely sweet. It was the face of a woman that had looked on life, and that knew something of its mystery. The lines of her figure were full and long, and she still walked and carried her head like a queen.

Nor had the years been less kind to Paul. His

fine face and distinguished appearance would have singled him out in any assemblage.

Phoebe was saying, "How long do you think he will have to stay?"

"I have no idea, but I imagine for a month or two, at least. The books seem to be in bad shape and they are too valuable to be neglected." If Paul had a weakness, it was the love of books.

"Poor old things! They do look neglected. Why, some of Grandfather Middleton's look as if they might have come out of the Ark."

"I am told that he had some very valuable editions, and that he was quite a collector of rare books," Paul answered.

"The first novel I ever read I dug out of his collection. It was *Ivanhoe*. Clay and Al and I had a tournament afterward, and had great fun," laughed Phoebe.

"I suppose you took the part of Rowena or Rebecca," Paul suggested.

"Oh, no, I didn't. I was the Black Knight. Maum Sylvie's two little black granddaughters were the fair ladies. We ran in the lane back of the carriage-house, and all the little negroes on the place were spectators," Phoebe reminisced softly.

"How I wish I had known you then," Paul said tenderly. "I always feel that I wasted so much time before I met you."

"I feel that we waste so much now, dear. We see

so little of each other, and we are getting old. Omar Khayyám is right when he says,

“‘The Bird of Time has but a little way
“To flutter—and the Bird is on the Wing.’”

“Never mind, love, it will not always be like this. You see I am obliged to think of the future of these boys.”

“You always think of the money, Paul, but I don’t want any more money. We have enough now to live on in our quiet way. All in the world that I want, darling, is *you*.”

And then for a few minutes they were as foolish as the most foolish heart could wish.

When Phoebe had emerged, she reverted to the matter of the books, and said, “By the way, when is this personage coming?”

“Let me see,” said Paul, “the letter said the sixth or seventh, and this is the sixth, isn’t it? Well, he isn’t here, so I suppose he will come to-morrow.

. . . Could you let him stay here? We are so far out that I think he would find it more convenient.”

“I suppose so,” said Phoebe carelessly, and that ended the matter.

Just then Eloise and Clifford and little Eloise came in, and a little later came Major Dalrymple, who had never married. He adored Phoebe’s boys.

CHAPTER II

It was a cool evening early in May. In the great northern city of Boston there was scarcely as yet even a promise of spring. Two figures, a man and a girl, were walking briskly along a quiet street. The houses, on either side, were of that neat and substantial appearance that denotes culture and refinement though no great amount of wealth in their possessors. The man was young and tall and well made; but as we shall shortly see him again under other circumstances, it is to the girl's appearance that we shall pay special attention. She was of medium height, and was well formed. She carried herself with the assured ease of a person that was well-bred, and that had always walked on the paved streets of a city. Her hair, of which she had a great quantity, was a pale shade of light brown. Her eyes, light brown when in the shade, were gray when in the light. She had a long, good nose, and a small, delicate mouth that when she smiled, which was seldom, disclosed a row of small, even, white teeth. Her coloring was very delicate on her cheek and lips, yet it showed sound health. It was a sweet, fair, pensive face, the face of one that a child would instinctively turn to and trust.

She was speaking in a tone full and sweet, yet distinctly northern.

“Do you still think you will go south to-morrow afternoon, Richard?” she said.

“Yes, I thought you knew that it was settled. Erickson says they wish me to come as soon as possible, so the sooner the better, say I,” and the man’s face beamed with pleasant anticipation.

“But it is very far, and so many things might happen. You *will* be glad to get back, will you *not*?” There was pensive tenderness in her voice, but the gentle, high-bred face did not change.

“Oh, I’ll be glad enough, but you must remember I have never been so far south before, and I’ll enjoy the experience. I always have liked going to new places and seeing new things. If I were rich, I should be a regular globe-trotter!”

“I am glad then that you are not rich, for it seems to me you are away a great deal as it is. First it was all the years at the University, and now that you have been doing this library work I feel as if you are always on the wing.”

Was there a little note of pathos in the sweet voice? If so, it was quickly overcome, for presently she asked:

“How do you travel? By boat?”

“Only part of the way. I go by train from Portsmouth.”

They had now turned in at a pair of snowy marble steps, and had rung the bell.

"Will you come in and see mother?" asked the girl.

"Well—— yes," the man answered a trifle indifferently. When the trim maid opened the door they went in together.

"Is that you, Minerva?" called a gentle voice from within.

"Yes, mother," answered the girl, "and Richard is with me. I'll lay off my coat, and then we will come in." She took off her trim blue jacket as she spoke, and then, taking off her close-fitting blue walking-hat, she hung them in the hall. With her pretty, white, gloveless hands she pushed up her hair until it fluffed softly. As she did so there was the sparkle of a solitaire diamond on the third finger of her left hand.

Turning to Richard, who had been standing hat in hand watching her, she said:

"Aren't you going to take off your coat? I am sure mother will ask you to dinner——"

"That will be awfully kind, but I can't stay to-night. I have some things I must do before I leave home; and, besides, mother expects me back to dine with her this evening."

The girl turned without further speech, and, pushing open the drawing-room door, ushered him into the room where her mother sat.

Mrs. Chippendale was just an older edition of her daughter except that what was as yet softness in the girl had hardened into firmness and strength

in the mother, and while the girl's abundant hair was pale brown, the mother's was silvery white.

The room that the young people entered was cozy and refined. From a bowl on the table came the odor of old-fashioned English violets.

"How sweet the violets are," said Richard, as, after having spoken to Mrs. Chippendale, he walked over to the table and helped himself to two or three.

"Yes," said Minerva, "are they not delicious? Mother grew them under glass, and they certainly are repaying her for her care. We have had some for the house for several days now."

Richard, upon being urged, sat down on the edge of his chair, and twirled his hat restlessly in his hands.

"Will you not stay to dinner?" Mrs. Chippendale asked. He declined, saying that he was not dressed for dinner and that his mother was expecting him at home.

"As for the dress I will excuse that," Mrs. Chippendale said, "and you can 'phone Marcia that we kept you. She will understand when she knows that you are here."

So Richard consented to stay. Minerva ran upstairs and in a little while came down in a dress of soft, clinging gray, embroidered with violets, and two or three of the same sweet flowers were caught in the lace at her throat. She was very sweet and fair and gentle looking, but there was a shadow, as of unshed tears, in her quiet eyes.

Mrs. Chippendale remained out of the drawing-room until dinner was announced, as she was attending to some household matter. Richard and Minerva were alone.

"How often may I expect a letter while you are away?" she asked. "You know the time will be dull for me without you."

"Oh, I shall certainly write every week; but you know from experience that I am a poor correspondent. What makes me care for you I believe almost more than anything else is that you don't expect a man to be always writing love-letters and talking love. You are so sensible!"

He patted her hand affectionately as he spoke, and looked kindly at her. The girl flushed faintly under the compliment, or the touch or the look, or something, but did not answer. She looked steadily into her lap. If Richard had put his hand under the pretty chin and had turned the grave eyes up to meet his own, he would have been surprised to see that they were shining with unshed tears.

During the dinner, which was daintily served, the conversation was on general topics, and soon afterward Richard rose to leave.

Mrs. Chippendale was in the room when he said good-bye to Minerva. For an instant he hesitated, then he leaned over and kissed the girl on her smooth fair forehead. It was a light, unloverlike salute, but it made her tingle to her finger-tips.

When he was gone she threw herself on her

mother's breast and sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Oh, mother," she said between her sobs, "there isn't any use. I cannot *make* him love me. *He* thinks he cares, but *I* know that he does not."

Then her mother said gently: "Never mind, love, he will learn your value some day. Do not demand that which he cannot give, but hold yourself in readiness to meet his demands. Richard has not yet sounded his own depths. He does not yet know himself. When he does find himself and comes to you, be sure that your love is great enough to meet his needs. A great love ennobles character, my darling, and yours is great. Some-day you will get your reward. In the meantime be brave and sweet—and wait."

The mother kissed the girl tenderly, sent her to bed, and then sat until late into the night looking into the glowing fire.

When Richard had said good-bye he slipped out into the chill night air, and, whistling softly, walked briskly up the street. Turning in when he came to one of a row of pretty houses, he inserted his night-key and let himself in.

His mother was still sitting in the library near a coal-fire, while sitting near, reading by a shaded lamp, was his younger brother, Oliver. Mrs. Carey was a tiny, fragile creature, so dainty and fair that she looked like a piece of Dresden china, and it was

hard to believe that she was the mother of the two tall young men that called her by that name.

"I have been waiting for you, Richard," she said as he entered the room. "How did you find Charlotte and Minerva?" Then, without waiting for him to answer, she went on, "Have you made up your mind to go south to-morrow?"

"Yes, mother," he answered. "I shall like to go. You know I never have been South."

"I think I shall be very much relieved when you come back home. The only part of the south that is fit to visit is Florida. . . . You may be able to learn a great deal, however, about the negroes throughout that whole section. . . . If you reach home safe, I shall be glad that you went, for I would like to know first-hand if the Southerners really do kill the negroes for sport."

Richard and Oliver exchanged glances, and then laughed; but the little lady sat very primly in her little chair and declined to be considered amusing.

CHAPTER III

The 6:30 A. M. train came rolling slowly into Melrose. A male passenger, who had the indescribable look of alert smartness that declared at once that he had been born north of Mason and Dixon's line, heaved a sigh of relief at having arrived.

He walked out of the Pullman, carrying his bag. As he came lightly down the steps and walked briskly up the long platform he showed off to advantage. He appeared to be somewhere between thirty and thirty-five years old, and he had a tall, well-set-up figure, square-shouldered and lean, and a finely shaped head covered with closely cut light-brown hair. His face was good-looking and clean-shaven. He had a long, shrewd Yankee nose and a large, well-shaped, expressive mouth, full of strong white teeth. He had a pair of the tenderest, dreamiest gray eyes that ever belied a sensible, practical face.

He stepped briskly up to a sleepy negro hackman that sat with one leg and slipshod foot hanging over the side of the hack while the horse stood dejectedly

on three legs. Referring to a memorandum that he had in his pocket the stranger asked in a voice distinctly northern to be taken to Mr. Paul Hamilton's place, Maplewood, at the end of Calhoun Street.

He stepped into the hack, and was driven off lazily. And they ambled up the street, the hackman airing his views regardless of invitation.

Richard Carey, for it was he, was looking out at this new world, with wide-open, interested eyes, and was taking in great breaths of the delicious soft morning air.

It looked to him like an enchanted city that he was passing through. The houses sat far back in wide gardens, and the cool green blinds were still closed, suggesting to his fanciful mind, that the houses, as well as their occupants, were still asleep.

In the gardens the roses were in full glory, red, pink, yellow, cream, and white. Indeed, there was every color of rose that one had ever seen or heard of, and their sweet odors were wafted by every straying breeze. Overhead the trees formed a feathery green arch, through which poured a golden rain of sunshine.

Here was a world made for romance, and Richard Carey, whose tender, dreamy eyes betrayed him, was full of it.

The drive to Maplewood took something over a half-hour, and during the whole of it they met no living creature except one or two negro cooks, who,

with baskets on their arms, were taking their leisurely way to their work. To Richard Carey even *they* seemed part of the enchantment, but then, he had never had one of them to cook for him.

Maplewood, with wide piazza and overhanging eaves, sitting back in its beautiful old-fashioned garden, was one of the few places about Melrose that dated back before the war. Miss McClintock had inherited it from her mother, and during her lifetime she had kept it intact. Phoebe and Paul had added a large sleeping porch and a wide piazza on the side nearest the river, but otherwise the outward appearance had not been altered.

The interior was beautifully furnished with priceless old furniture, much of which had been brought from Europe before the Revolution.

Paul had had two large rooms on the west side of the house converted into one to form a library, and it was there that the books were to be arranged.

The hackman leisurely drove around the circular drive, and stopped at the bottom of the wide stone steps. Just as Richard stepped from the vehicle the heavy front door was thrown violently open, and two sturdy boys of fourteen rushed out.

They were exactly the same size and the same build. Both had closely cropped curly auburn hair and brown eyes: both had the same bright cheeks and merry smile, showing the same kind of white teeth: both had firm chins, cleft in the middle, and both had a bridge of freckles across a straight young

nose: both wore tan shoes and stockings, brown knickerbockers, white blouses, and blue-and-tan ties. To make the resemblance more complete, if that were possible, each was chased by a half-grown Irish setter.

The boys stopped short. Richard stared. He thought that the southern air had gone to his brain, that he had suddenly become mildly demented, that his malady was taking the form of a multiplicity of boys and dogs exactly alike. The boys saw his look of puzzled amazement and fell into a roulade of merry laughter, while the puppies rushed frantically around, barking as if they too were into the joke.

Richard continued to stare, the boys laughed, the puppies barked, while the hackman took a chew of tobacco, and viewed the whole with mild, dispassionate eye.

Richard, still feeling that his reason tottered and that something must be done at once to arrest its fall, asked mildly, "Are you Mr. Hamilton's son?"

Another roulade of laughter, another frantic rush of the frantic puppies, then Paul pulled himself together and said with dignity and putting accent on the *plural*:

"We are his *sons*. I am Paul Davidge Hamilton, and this is my twin, Henry Clay Middleton Hamilton. You must be Mr. Carey." Paul held out his hand as he spoke and then continued, "Our father

is expecting you. Come in, and we will tell him that you are here."

"Thank you, Mr. Paul Davidge Henry Clay Middleton Hamilton," said Richard with a grave mouth but looking from one to the other with laughing eyes.

They ran off to call their father, both shouting back as they left the room each with a setter at his heels, "But we *are two!*"

A half-hour later, when Paul ushered Richard into the dining-room, the boys had inveigled Hester into letting them have their breakfast and had already gone. Phoebe, with her soft dark hair loosely coiled on the top of her head and with two or three soft curls touched with silver at her temples, was in the dining-room alone.

She was wearing a simple morning dress of black and white muslin, and was arranging a handful of Duchess roses in a frosted glass bowl on the breakfast table. She had pinned one lovely cup-like blossom in the lace on the bosom of her dress. As she turned to greet the men her face still showed her pleasure in the task that she had been performing.

"Phoebe," said Paul, "this is Mr. Carey, whom we were expecting. Mr. Carey, this is my wife, Mrs. Hamilton."

Phoebe came forward graciously and cordially, and clasped Richard's hand in a firm friendly grasp.

CHAPTER IV

During breakfast the conversation for a while was about Richard's journey and the work with the books. Phoebe had little to say beyond seeing that their guest was comfortably served.

Once Richard turned to her and said, "Those are two fine boys of yours, Mrs. Hamilton," at which she dimpled and looked as pleased as a girl.

After breakfast Paul took Richard into the library to talk over what was to be done, and a few minutes later they saw Phoebe crossing the yard carrying a covered tray. Paul looked admiringly at her, and said:

"If any question arises at any time, just ask Mrs. Hamilton. She really is better informed than I am along these lines. . . . She lives here and I *don't*, so she is the one to be pleased."

He noticed that Richard Carey looked surprised but said nothing. Little did he dream, however, that Richard, in his matter-of-fact Yankee fashion, had put the worst possible construction upon his careless words, and that on this first morning, Richard Carey's tender heart had gone out in sympathy to the beautiful woman that he, Paul Hamilton, called wife.

For several days Richard saw very little of Phoebe, except at meal time, but he often heard her speaking in the other part of the house, and he invariably found himself stopping to listen. Her voice was very full and sweet, and he wondered if she sang. He wondered, too, if that little pathetic note at the end of her voice was because she knew about her husband's unfaithfulness and was unhappy.

These southern people interested him greatly, and as he worked he speculated a good deal about them.

"The idea," he thought, "of a man's making a light boast of not living with his wife, and to a stranger, too!"

He could not understand the conditions that existed in Paul Hamilton's home, especially as his and Paul's friend, Professor Erickson, had spoken highly of Paul. These changes in character evidently had come about since Paul lived in Boston, for, from all accounts, he was a clean fellow then and had good principles.

Richard had always heard that there was a great deal of immorality in the south, and he supposed that the situation at Maplewood only went to prove it.

He loved books and he found his work very pleasant, though he was a trifle lonely. There were a great many books, and he was making a general examination, first putting the books that were rare editions in one place, and those that needed to be

re-bound in another. With a good brush and a strong pot of glue he was carefully repairing any slightly worn ones, putting all the books that were in good condition in a class to themselves. When this was done he was to paste in book plates, with name and number and the general subject of which the book treated. Then he was to follow that by making a catalogue of the whole, with special reference to subject matter and related groups. This was a work of no slight magnitude, and required patience and a thorough knowledge of books.

At one end of the long bright library had been made alcoves, so as to give more room for the books: at the other end flat shelves were arranged against the walls. The room was furnished with a large reading-table and with comfortable chairs. In the niches above the alcoves were busts of Phoebe's and Paul's favorite authors, statesmen, musicians, sculptors, and painters. At the other end of the room, between the bookcases and over the windows, were pictures of several beautiful landscapes and water scenes. On the reading-table Phoebe said she intended to have only a good globe and a reading-lamp.

While Richard worked, however, the reading-table wore a heavy felt cover, and he used it as a center of operations. He wished sometimes that Mrs. Hamilton would come in and talk to him as he worked, but she never did.

The boys made themselves very free when they

came home from school. Richard always felt as if he and his books had been involved in a cyclone after one of their visits. Phoebe never let them stay very long, but called them after a few minutes and made them go out either to ride or to play. "They certainly are fine boys," Richard thought, "but they are as full of curiosity and restless spirits as an egg is of meat."

Paul frequently failed to come to dinner and many times at night he came so late that Richard did not see him. Richard generally worked only a short time after tea, and then either walked into the city for exercise or went to his room.

The boys had their school work to prepare in the evenings, but Richard did not know what Mrs. Hamilton did, and he often fancied that she might be dull. He often wished that she would talk to him. There were so many things he would like to know about, and then, too, it would be interesting to know how *she* looked at things. What a woman, he thought, to lead such a life.

She never placed herself in his way, however, and he could not ask her to come and talk to him. She might think that he was impertinent, he thought.

He had been told that southern people resented impertinence very quickly, and he did not wish to make her angry. She was always kind when they met, and she had in many quiet, unobtrusive ways shown thought for his comfort and convenience. He wondered where she went every morning carry-

ing a covered tray, and he soon commenced to stand where he could see the tall, handsome figure cross the yard, with the puppies, Snap and Ginger, frisking about her skirts. Sometimes she came back in a few minutes, sometimes she stayed an hour or more. Whether her stay was short or long, though, he always managed to stand with his face to the window, and he never failed to see her as she passed back to the house. Somehow it made him feel less lonely to see her about.

Once or twice he plucked up courage to go and ask her some trivial thing in regard to the books, and once she had stayed in the library chatting lightly with him afterward.

“Paul says that the bust of Handel is to be the dead line, and that I am to keep myself and all my belongings on this side,” she said.

“Why, if that be the case, you’ll have *all* the good things over here, will you not?”

He looked smilingly and curiously at her to see what she would say, but she looked down and did not answer except by a light, impersonal laugh.

CHAPTER V

Richard's room at Maplewood was on the south side of the house and overlooked the beautiful old garden. This garden was beautiful at all times. Beautiful, when winter wove a blanket of snow for it, and the hedges and evergreens glistened in the cold white moonlight: beautiful in the spring, when the hedges and dark evergreens first showed buddings of tender green, when the *pyrus japonica* showed its bare branches full of deep pink buds, when the first blue-bird, that daring harbinger of spring, gave forth his melting notes from the top of the great magnolia: beautiful in summer, when the roses and lilies were in their glory: and beautiful in the autumn, when the old-fashioned October flowers and the purple and white asters lifted their sweet faces to the sun, when the hickories were like cloth-of-gold, and when the crêpe-myrtle burst into flame.

On one side of the garden was the flower-pit, through the glass panes in the top of which could be seen the rich crimson and delicate white geranium blossoms against a background of apple and rose and spice. The pit could be opened on sunny days even in winter for the tall hedges kept out the wind

and the kiss of the sun was warm and sweet. The gray walks stretched in every direction, and were bordered with jonquils and daffodils, which in the spring hung their golden cups over the paths. A red-bird and his family had a nest in the lilac hedge and Richard had seen him several times looking like a crimson shooting-star and had heard him calling to his mate.

In the little triangular beds in the corners of the garden were always found the first violets, and close by in an arbor overrun with starry jasmine were some seats and a table, where in warm weather Phoebe sometimes had tea served.

There were roses in profusion scattering their wealth of crimson and pink and yellow and cream and white petals on the grass and waving their arms in gentle plaint to the tall hedges around them.

On the first Thursday morning after his arrival at Maplewood Richard lay in bed lazily enjoying a delicious sense of physical well being and listening to the songs of the birds in the garden. A mocking-bird was pouring out its little heart from the great magnolia, while from the lilac hedge he could distinguish the flute-like note of his friend the red-bird. The jay-birds and sparrows, too, were chattering as if they were determined to make up in quantity for what they lacked in quality of voice.

Suddenly a new note sounded under his window. It was Phoebe's voice, and she was saying:

“We will put all red into your basket, Paul; all

white into Clay's, while I will take whatever is left in mine."

"Let me do the cutting," cried one of the boys.

"No, let me," shouted the other.

"Oh, you can't cut," exclaimed the first.

"Yes, I can," declared the second.

"You know you are the one that cut the stems too short last year."

"Yes, but you are the one that cut William's onion tops and brought them in for bachelor buttons." There was a chorus of laughter from all three at this.

"Well, run and ask Hester to lend you the kitchen scissors and get the old pair out of my basket, and then we can all cut. Hurry, or we will not finish before breakfast."

Two wild Indian war-whoops and two pair of scampering feet told Richard that the boys, Paul and Clay, were providing themselves with scissors, and presently the babel of voices under his window told that the implements had been provided.

"I'll cut red!" shouted one.

"I'll cut white!" shouted the other.

"I'll cut what's left!" shouted Phoebe, in exact imitation of the boys.

Then a mighty snip-snip-snipping began.

"Now, I wonder what they are doing," thought Richard, and throwing off the light cover, he went to the window and looked out.

The boys looked as fresh as daisies, and were

racing to see which would fill his basket first. Phoebe was gathering Duchess roses and her cheeks were flushed just the color of the delicate blossoms.

The best word to describe Richard's manner of getting into his clothes was *scramble*, as he wished to get down and help them with whatever they were doing. They seemed to be cutting every flower in the garden. When he got down-stairs, however, the baskets of roses were on the table in the back piazza and the boys were laboriously brushing the dew from Phoebe's short skirt and heavy boots. She, with her hair a little tumbled and breathing a little quickly from the exercise, was laughing and telling Paul something as Richard came down.

The boys had to hurry through breakfast, as it was time to go to school, the others had letters to read, and there was practically no conversation during the meal.

After breakfast Richard saw Phoebe hurrrying across the yard with the tray, but she stayed only a few minutes, and when she came in she put on her gloves and immediately commenced to work with the flowers again. He had made up his mind to go and talk to her, and ask her what she was going to do with so many flowers. Then he heard her talking to some one that she called Eloise.

They sat down at the table, and worked and chatted, but he could hear only the sound of their voices, and could not make out anything that they said. After a while a nurse came with two little

fair-haired children that seemed to belong to the lady called Eloise, and Phoebe, quitting the roses, ran down the steps to the little cart and brought in the little fair-haired baby in her arms.

One of the windows of the library opened directly on the back piazza, and Richard could hardly help seeing what was going on out there. Truth compels it to be added that he did not try. How beautiful Mrs. Hamilton was, he thought, and how like a madonna she looked with the little fair child in her arms. He had always been fond of children himself, and this little fellow with one chubby hand on Phoebe's bare neck where her collar rolled back was very attractive.

After a while, when all the flowers had been made into wreaths and crosses and great rainbow bouquets and had been laid on big waiters and thoroughly sprinkled, the ladies and children disappeared and left Richard in peace.

The boys came home from school earlier than usual and appeared at the dinner table in snow white suits and red ties. Phoebe, too, came down evidently dressed to go out. To Richard's surprise even Paul was evidently not going back to the office that afternoon.

After dinner Hester and William both came out and helped to stow the flowers in the big automobile.

Suddenly Paul turned to Richard and said, "Why, Mr. Carey, would you care to go?"

"Where are you going?" answered Richard. "I do not understand."

"Why, of course," cried Phoebe; "how stupid and inattentive you must think us! I thought that of course you knew it was Memorial Day. I forgot that your day is different from ours." Then, turning kindly to him, she said, "We shall be glad to have you go with us, if you care to go."

"Thank you," said Richard; "I should like it above all things."

In a short while they were speeding along in the automobile, Richard on the front seat with Paul and the two boys in the tonneau with Phoebe. She did not talk much to Richard and Paul, for her time was largely taken up in keeping the boys from crushing the flowers and from soiling their white suits.

As they sped down the streets they saw coming out of almost every house women and children dressed in white with red ribbons and carrying great bunches of flowers. At every street corner there was a group of persons waiting to take the car.

During a pause in Paul's conversation Richard heard Phoebe say softly: "Yes, Paul darling, your father's father was killed. My father was a soldier, too, but he was not killed in battle. He lived until after you and Clay were born."

This war then, Richard thought, had come very near to this family, and suddenly his heart was

filled with the pity of it all and he understood as he had never before done the pathos of the Lost Cause.

When they reached Evergreen Cemetery it seemed as if all Melrose was there. Paul and Richard sat in the automobile until the procession was formed, but Phoebe and the boys got out. Phoebe and several other ladies distributed the flowers that she had brought among the children that had none.

The boys, each carrying a great bunch of crimson roses, went forward to march and sing with the school children. The veterans came next, and then the Daughters of the Confederacy, and last, it seemed to Richard, all the men and women in Melrose. There were no flags, no band, no cannon, only this long line of marching men, women, and children.

Just as they began to move all the church-bells in the city commenced to toll.

Phoebe came back with Paul and Richard, and walked gravely along between them. When they had nearly reached the enclosure around the soldiers' graves they passed a tall white shaft. It bore a soldier's name and the date of his death and was marked *U. S. A.* Richard felt a warm glow around his heart when he saw one of the twins step forward and place a wreath at its base.

Phoebe said gently by way of explanation, "He was my father's friend."

When the procession halted a prayer was offered, then the sweet, fresh voices of the children sang a hymn, during the singing of which the men stood with bared heads and the flowers were laid on the graves. An old minister, a veteran of three wars, pronounced the benediction, a rosy cheeked boy bugler sounded "Taps," and the ceremonies were over.

Richard looked around at the great crowd of people slowly dispersing and his tender eyes grew misty.

When the boys reached the automobile they wished to go for a ride, but Phoebe said, "Not to-day," and they all went home.

Paul was at home for the whole evening and he and Phoebe sat out on the piazza. The boys played duets in the drawing-room, and Richard, feeling very restless, went for a long walk in the country.

CHAPTER VI

On Sunday the Hamiltons invited Richard to go to church with them, but he, being a devout Catholic, begged to be excused. Paul then offered to him the use of Gary and the buggy, which offer he gladly accepted. He started out soon after breakfast, taking his kodak and a box of lunch that Phoebe had fixed for him.

He was very glad of an opportunity to drive through the country, and stayed out until after dinner, taking pictures and getting a number of interesting new floral specimens. He was devoted to flowers and was a botanist of some ability. Late in the afternoon he came back to Maplewood, and, not seeing William anywhere, drove the horse to the stable himself. As he was particularly fond of horses, he stopped to give the animal a gentle rub-down and some water and hay after the long drive. While he was thus engaged he heard a voice near-by, which he instantly recognized. The voice was reading aloud:

“And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and the Lamb.

"In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."

The sweet, clear, full voice paused, and something that he could not understand was said by another fretful, peevish voice.

Then he stood spell-bound while a voice, as soft and as clear as a lute, but so perfectly modulated that it would not have been noticed across the yard, sang one sweet old hymn after the other just as a mother might sing to an ailing, fretful child.

This then, Richard thought, was the person that she came every morning to see. Who could it be? All kinds of surmises surged through his brain. His innate delicacy forbade his seeming too curious, but he felt as if he *must* find out. Stepping to the back of the stable whence the voices seemed to come he peeped through a high hedge of evergreens and saw beyond a beautiful and touching sight.

In the midst of a little garden surrounded by tall green hedges was a two-room house covered with a luxuriant wistaria vine. There was no porch, but in front of the tiny house on the ground were placed several comfortable home-made oak chairs. In one of these sat an old negro woman, wrinkled and helpless; and Richard instantly saw from the expression of her face that she was blind.

Near-by, her Bible still open on her knee, sat

Phoebe. Her expression was sweet and tender, but Richard thought it a little weary. He felt ashamed of looking at her when she was entirely off guard, so he stopped noiselessly back and started to the house.

In a few minutes Phoebe came in, looking gentle and serene. She was dressed in a plain white linen walking-dress, the simple lines of which were particularly becoming to her tall, handsome figure.

Paul, who, to Richard's surprise, was at home, was showing the library to Dr. Carmichael. The boys and the dogs were not visible. As soon as Paul saw Richard coming in he came cordially forward and introduced him to Dr. Carmichael, saying: "This is the man that is doing the work, doctor, so I'll let him tell you. I know more about textile industries than I do about books, as Phoebe here can testify."

As he spoke he turned affectionately to his wife, who at that moment came into the room. Phoebe came forward smiling and turned a smooth cheek for the old doctor to kiss.

"Well, madam," he said, "what have you been doing to yourself?" Then, turning to Paul, he added, "I believe she is prettier than when I first met her nearly twenty years ago."

Paul smiled and Phoebe laid her hand over his mouth.

"You shall not laugh," she said saucily, "when the doctor compliments me." Then, turning to the doctor, she added, "He is so used to me that I think he forgets all about my looks."

But Paul drew her lovingly to him. "No, I don't," he said; "you know well enough what I think." And Phoebe looked serenely content.

While this little byplay was going on Richard Carey looked questioningly from one to the other. There was something here that he did not understand. Was Paul Hamilton a double-faced villain? Or didn't she care? Or—or what? He could not puzzle it out. His thoughts were interrupted by hearing the old doctor ask where the boys were. Phoebe told him that they had gone to take some roses to Eloise, who was not well.

The doctor, as much at home in Paul's house as he was in his own, announced his intention of staying to tea.

"They are the finest boys in this city, Mr. Carey," he said, turning to Richard, "and I am never satisfied not to see them when I come. By the way," turning to Phoebe, "I didn't know Eloise was ill?"

"Well, she isn't exactly ill," said Phoebe, "she is tired, that's all. She had a party for little Eloise yesterday afternoon, and she overtaxed herself getting ready for it. She wanted it to be the finest that had ever been known in Melrose."

Phoebe laughed with indulgent amusement.

"Faugh!" the doctor exclaimed, "these mothers—most of them, I mean"—making a little quick whimsical bow to Phoebe, "positively rile me!"

. . . How old is that child, madam? Eight? I thought so. What can her mother expect of her

when she is grown? . . . The finest party ever known in Melrose, and the child is only eight! Do you wonder our women, with few exceptions, are idle and vain and have feeble bodies and minds when their mothers start them out at *eight!*"

Dr. Carmichael pranced up and down the floor in indignant protest.

"Well," laughed Phoebe, "if you are going to discuss the follies of women, I'll go and draw the tea." She swept out of the room with great dignity, her head held high in the air.

CHAPTER VII

A little later Richard had occasion to go into the dining-room to get a glass of water. He could hear Phoebe moving about in the pantry, humming softly to herself. Just as he was turning to go out, she called, "Is that you Paul? I wish you would——"

"It is I," Mrs. Hamilton," answered Richard, opening the door to the pantry as he spoke; "is there anything that I can do for you?"

"Oh! is it you, Mr. Carey? I thought you were Paul. Well, if you don't mind, I will ask you to reach that jar on the top shelf for me. Dr. Carmichael enjoys peach preserves very much, and I am getting too old to climb."

Richard lingered, watching her fair, capable hands as she skilfully opened the jar and then with a long-handled spoon spread the fruit on a dish.

"I am wondering," she said presently, "if you can carve. I *can't*, and I hate to call Paul. He dotes so on Dr. Carmichael and so seldom sees him. There is a cold fowl, but it will be simply mangled if I undertake to carve it. That is where Hester spoils me. I have never had to learn."

Richard signified his willingness to attempt the carving; in fact, he would readily have tried almost anything in order to prolong what was to him a

most interesting bit of experience. This southern woman interested him strangely, and he wondered to himself in what her fascination lay. She certainly was indifferent to him and to his opinion of her, however, and he half thought that this was what made her so attractive to him. He hadn't been accustomed to having women treat him in this sweet, impersonal, indifferent way, and he caught himself wishing that he could make her look interested in him.

The carving progressed after a fashion, and Phoebe gave a gay little laugh when she saw the result.

"Anyway," she said, "the future Mrs. Carey will thank me for helping with your education. Or perhaps," she added, questioningly, "there is already one?"

"No, not yet, but there is a fiancée, though."

"So there is a sweetheart! Where does she live? In Boston?"

Phoebe, like all true women, adored a love-affair. She looked at the tall, gray-eyed young man beside her with suddenly increased interest.

"When you go back to Boston tell her that I taught you to carve in preparation for her house-keeping."

They both laughed; and after that she treated him less vaguely and with more friendliness.

She thanked him cordially for helping her, and said:

"Paul and Clay usually help me Sunday afternoons, but I suspect they stayed to play with Eloise. They think she is a wonder, and I like for them to be thrown with girls. It is good for a boy's manners." Then she added tenderly, "And theirs certainly need it."

"Where are the servants this afternoon?" Richard asked.

"Oh!" laughed Phoebe, "you show that you are freshly imported. Why, they are off, of course. You should have seen them arrayed in all their glory, going out after dinner."

In a few minutes the boys and dogs came rushing in, striking the erstwhile quiet house like a whirlwind; and Richard, finding himself no longer of use in the pantry, reluctantly got a book and sat down.

He did not read, however. He kept going over in his mind the scenes of the afternoon and puzzling his brain about the relations that existed between Mr. Hamilton and Mrs. Hamilton. However puzzling they were, he could not bring himself to think that Phoebe was anything but pure and good.

As for Paul, Richard did not know what to think. The man certainly seemed to be a gentleman, and to love his wife. But he himself had told how matters stood between them, so there could be no doubt. It was sacrilege to think of such a thing though, and Richard did not see why the public allowed it. The lax southern idea, without a doubt, made

such a condition possible, he thought. He had a strong sense of duty; it was hard to sit idly by and see such an injustice done. In the excess of his indignant speculation, he got up and strode restlessly about the rooms.

At the tea-table Phoebe, who was always at her best when she was conscious of being loved and admired, was charming. Dr. Carmichael showed his delight in her by the most open and barefaced flattery, while Paul ran him a close second. Even Richard entered into the spirit of the fun and paid her one or two delicately veiled compliments. Each time he brought a faint glow of color to her cheeks. He could not help making the experiment, though he wondered why she received his gallant speeches differently from the way in which she received the others that had been made. Was it because he was a Yankee? He wondered. She seemed so sane and so broad-minded that this explanation hardly seemed possible. Still he could think of no other reason for her attitude toward him.

He had no idea that he was recalling something in Phoebe's nature that had lain absolutely dormant for eighteen years—ever since she had first cared for Paul. Since then no man had interested her beyond a passing pleasant greeting, and it gave her a little thrill of power to find that this good-looking stranger found her still worth pleasing.

There was no evening service, and they sat in the drawing-room chatting for a while after tea.

Then the doctor had a telephone call from across town. While he waited for his car, he led Phoebe in his old-fashioned, courteous manner to the piano and asked her to sing. Phoebe, always accommodating, complied at once and sat down, asking as she did so, "What shall it be?"

The doctor, settling himself with his head thrown well back, said, "Oh, I don't know, child; just anything."

But the twins begged for "My Ain Countrie," and Richard noticed that although they had been very restless, tussling with each other most of the evening, they now came into the room and were perfectly quiet.

Phoebe sang again the quaint sweet old hymn, pouring out all the tenderness of her heart into the golden notes. When she finished, her little group of listeners sat perfectly still.

Richard had heard her singing at Mammy Linda's in the afternoon, but then she had so modulated her voice that it was more like a soothing lullaby. Now she let it out until it filled the great room, and the flood of exquisite melody almost overcame him.

Richard gave a furtive glance at Paul to see how he was affected by his wife's singing, and was surprised to see that his eyes were misty and tender. Again the puzzling question arose:

What could be the matter between them?

CHAPTER VIII

The next morning it was raining and as Phoebe came across the yard from Mammy Linda's she had her fresh morning-dress caught up and held in such a way as to show her shapely ankles and feet. She was entirely unconscious of any eye's being upon her, and had no thought of how attractive and girlish she looked.

Something, however, she knew not what, impelled her to look up at the library window and there she met the eager, curious eyes of Richard Carey intently fixed upon her. It was not the first time that she had seen him at the window, but it was the first time that a queer feeling stirred within her and she knew that he was watching *her*.

She dropped her eyes quickly and passed into the house, but all that day her thoughts kept reverting to him. Why was he looking at her like that? Why was he looking at all? She kept asking herself these questions.

Paul did not come home to dinner that day, and the boys had a great game of baseball on hand for the afternoon; so, except at dinner, which was served at the hour that was customary in Melrose, three o'clock in the afternoon, Phoebe was entirely

alone all day. She could hear Richard moving about in the library, and she had a faint impulse to go and talk to him—the first that she had ever had. But she decided to practice a while instead. Something vague and intangible impelled her to let him know that she was in the house. One song after another she sang and she put her whole soul into the work. Neither of them knew it, but she was singing to him. For the first time she was really thinking of Richard Carey! What could he have meant by looking at her like that? It was not a look of impertinence, though. She was sure of that. It was more as if he were looking because he really wished to see her. She had a little peculiar warm feeling when she thought of it, and she thought of it a great deal.

In the library Richard was making no pretence of working with the books. He was sitting with his face in his hands listening intensely. How beautiful her voice was! How strangely moved he was by it! In all his life, music lover as he was, he could not recall any voice that had so touched him. It must be, he thought, because he knew the sad and tragic circumstances of her life. She seemed a woman just made for love and happiness, and he could not understand Paul Hamilton.

That evening as she sat alone in the quiet, cool darkness of the piazza he ventured out, letting her infer that he had not known that she was there. Again she had that queer feeling as if something

stirred, and she knew absolutely that he came because she was there.

Phoebe, with just a little tingle of pleasure in her veins, laughed and chatted and made herself charming as only Phoebe knew how to do—when she tried. Richard was entranced and even fancied that she, too, was enjoying the evening. Presently, however, they heard the honk! honk! of Paul's automobile, and Phoebe, all forgetful of Richard, ran to meet Paul.

Not knowing that Richard was on the piazza, Paul came out with his arm around her. He let it drop, however, when she said, "Here is Mr. Carey, Paul."

Richard rose, and shortly afterward went to his room. Paul and Phoebe sat quietly on the piazza until far into the night, and Richard upstairs at his open window could not understand them.

He was restless that night and could not sleep. He got up and tried to write to Minerva Chippendale, but he finally laid the pen down. The words would not come. It would be absurd, he thought, for him to write that he was remarkably interested in a beautiful married woman, the mother of two fine boys, whose husband was unfaithful to her. That was absolutely all that he could think of to say except that she was very large and very beautiful with a regal kind of beauty that he had never seen anything like before, and that she had a voice of pure gold that touched even the heart of her villain of a husband. Manifestly he could not write

such nonsense as that, so he impatiently pushed the paper away and tried once more to puzzle out what was the trouble between Phoebe and her husband.

They certainly seemed to care for each other, and if she knew of her husband's unfaithfulness she gave no sign in his presence. A sudden thought came to Richard. Maybe that was her woman's way to win him back. If it were, though, it was not succeeding, for it seemed to Richard that Paul stayed away almost all the time.

The next morning it was still raining, and when Phoebe as usual started across the yard with the tray and an umbrella, she was surprised to hear Richard Carey's voice near her, saying:

"Won't you let me assist you?"

She smiled at him in a bright, friendly, impersonal way and said:

"If you will be so kind. It is rather difficult to hold the umbrella and carry the tray at the same time, and a woman's skirts always have to be reckoned with."

They fell into an even pace and crossed the yard quickly. Phoebe was conscious of a little quickening of the pulses and a slight feeling of exhilaration. She could not have told why. Perhaps, she thought, it was because she felt a little awkward at walking under the same umbrella with this stranger.

He asked a great many questions about Mammy Linda as they walked along and seemed to listen rather curiously for Phoebe's answers.

"Why, she has taken care of three generations of us," Phoebe said. "She nursed my mother, she nursed me, and she nursed Paul and Clay, so you see she is just like a member of the family."

Richard looked surprised. "Why, I didn't know that any of you southern people thought of the negroes as equals?"

Phoebe gave a little gasp of horror. "Who ever heard of such a thing!" she cried. "Of course we don't! I love Mammy better than I do almost anybody I know except Paul and the boys, but I don't think of her as an *equal*. She is just *Mammy*!"

They both laughed merrily at her logic and then Richard asked if she were going to sing again that morning. Phoebe looked surprised, and then he acknowledged that he had heard her the Sunday afternoon before. She colored and looked grave, and he saw that he had said the wrong thing.

She would not let him come any farther than the door with her. Thanking him sedately she took the tray and went in, closing the door softly behind her. He walked back through the rain, thinking over the inconsistencies that he was finding in these people. When Phoebe came in an hour later he still had made no headway with his work, but rushed out to ask her some trivial questions that would make her stop and talk to him.

To his surprise she seemed quite willing to talk, and she even sat idly in the library for a few min-

utes. When she left the little contact with her gave a spice to the rest of the day.

All that day and for several days afterward Richard saw nothing of Phoebe except at mealtime, when sometimes Paul and always the twins were present.

Paul was often not there except for breakfast, when he usually read the paper as he ate his egg and drank his coffee. He usually took dinner down in the city as he was very busy and the weather was warm. Often he did not get in until after tea, and frequently he had to go out again. He was working too hard and was looking ill. Phoebe was up in arms about it.

"I don't see, Paul," she said indignantly, "why you have to do the whole thing?"

"Well, I do not," he replied; "the other officers work just as hard as I do. Only I practically have two offices, and that makes me have to do double work, which is no easy matter in a big concern like ours. I am still young, though, and I can stand it for a while. I must get things where I want them, and then I'll retire."

Phoebe smiled half-heartedly and let the matter drop. She had heard the same story so many times!

CHAPTER IX

One lovely morning Phoebe announced at the breakfast table that she was going that day to see Miss Phyllis. The boys immediately shouted, "Wait until Saturday, mother, so that we can go with you."

Phoebe laughed. "Maybe that is why I have selected a day that isn't Saturday," she said. "Poor Miss Phyllis might not care to have quite so many of us come in without warning."

"How do you go?" asked Paul.

"I thought I would drive out in the buggy while it is still cool," Phoebe answered.

"I think you had better go in the automobile. I'll make William take me down to the office, and come back for you. I don't like the idea of your driving so far alone. One reads of such terrible things happening."

It was settled that Phoebe should go in the automobile, and Paul and the boys hurried away. Richard went into the library to work, and Phoebe busied herself making preparations for the visit.

Finally everything was ready and she came downstairs. Her hat was securely tied on with a delicate blue veil. The soft blue was very kind to the gentle

dark eyes and clear pink cheeks, and she looked very lovely as Richard saw her through the window.

He heard a cry of disappointment from her. The automobile had come back.

"But, William," Richard heard Phoebe say, "is Eliza very sick? Couldn't you wait until the afternoon to go to see her. My basket is all fixed and the roses are gathered. Besides I have planned to go and you know how I hate to be disappointed."

"Yes, ma'am, Miss Phoebe, I understand, an' I hates to disappoint you; but de boy say 'Liza is powerful bad off, an' I'se all she got.'" William's sister was sick and she had sent for him.

"Well, if you must, you must, I suppose. I'll just have to give it up. I did not know that I wished to go so much until I find that I can't," and Phoebe looked the picture of despair.

"I can drive, Mrs. Hamilton, and will be delighted to take you where you wish to go, if you will trust yourself to me?"

Phoebe turned with a little start. Richard was at her elbow.

"You, Mr. Carey! wouldn't you mind? I do so hate to put off things when I have planned."

"I should be delighted to serve you," said Richard, "and I shall enjoy the ride."

"I think you do deserve a holiday," laughed Phoebe, "if driving me to see Miss Phyllis is one. I'll hear your opinion of that as we come back."

In a few minutes they were in the big automobile

speeding down the country road, Phoebe sitting in the tonneau with her little basket covered with a fresh napkin and holding her big bunch of roses so as to protect them from the wind. Richard sat very straight on the front seat seemingly giving all his attention to driving the big car. Phoebe's hand had touched his as he helped her into the car and he was mentally trying to account for the feeling of elation that the touch had given him. It was the first time that he had touched her since the morning of his arrival in Melrose, when she had shaken hands with him. The difference in the effect on him was certainly marked.

During the ride there was very little conversation. Richard's thoughts kept him entertained when he was not busy with the automobile, and Phoebe was in a quiet mood. The road was good, the sky was blue, the birds were singing and calling to one another and the air was warm and sweet as it fanned their cheeks as they fairly flew along.

Richard, for some inexplicable reason, felt strangely light-hearted and happy.

"Do use your eyes, Mr. Carey, while we are there," Phoebe said; "I want you specially to notice the pictures."

"Why?" asked Richard; "are they fine?"

"No," answered Phoebe, "not fine, but interesting. I will not tell you anything about Miss Phyllis, but I think you will find her interesting. I think she is charming, and Paul and the boys adore her."

"Who is she if I may ask that much?" inquired Richard.

"She is an old friend of my mother's, and she lives out here in the country entirely alone. This big gate is the entrance to her domain," said Phoebe, as the road made a sudden turn through the woods and came out on an open space with fences and fields on either side.

They opened the gate and went in. On one side of the road leading up to the house was a cotton-field, in a very poor state of cultivation; on the other side was a dilapidated split-rail fence, in the corners of which grew thick masses of oak, dogwood, and sumac bushes, tied together by a countless variety of wild vines.

The house itself was a small one-storied affair with disproportionately tall red chimneys, and with tiny windows that had countless panes.

There was no fence, and in the yard a brood of half-fledged chickens was chasing bugs. On each side of the steps there was a tall round clump of mock orange. In a far corner of the yard, near the well that had an old-fashioned sweep and a bucket, stood a big cape jasmine, covered with snowy wax-like flowers that perfumed the whole place with their heavy fragrance.

The sound of the automobile brought Miss Phyllis to the door before Phoebe got out. Richard wished to remain in the car, but Phoebe would not hear of it.

"Why, Miss Phyllis would be insulted," she said; "the etiquette in the country demands that you go in." He got out and they walked up to the house together.

Miss Phyllis, a tall, stooping person, was dressed in a gray calico wrapper of ancient pattern. Her feet were shod in loose, shapeless cloth shoes. Her hands were slender and bony, and had the broad flat finger tips that denote power and skill.

But Richard's eyes sought her face and rested there. Such a wonderful face it was! The hair that surrounded it was iron-gray. It grew in heavy waves on her brow and her neck, and was caught together in a great careless, loose knot on the top of her head. Her brow was low and broad and the heavy black eyebrows almost met in a deep line above her long straight nose. Her mouth was large and grave, and the lips were bloodless. Indeed, over her whole face was the waxen pallor that usually comes to those that are poorly nourished and that live much indoors. Her eyes were large and full and gray, with heavy curling lashes, and looked out on the world with the trustfulness of a very young child.

She came forward as Phoebe and Richard neared the steps, a pleased brightness shining from the depths of her beautiful eyes.

"I am so glad to see you," she said to Phoebe, in a deep, soft, slurring voice, and reaching up to kiss her visitor's smooth, fair cheek.

"This is Mr. Carey, Miss Phyllis," Phoebe said,

turning to Richard; "he was kind enough to bring me out in the car."

"I am very glad to meet you, Mr. Carey," she said.

Then taking them each by the hand she led them into the house. The little room that they entered was pathetic in its bareness and poverty, yet it proclaimed in unmistakable accents that it was the home of a lady. The window frames and the mantel were painted white; the wall spaces were painted gray. Phoebe afterward told Richard that Miss Phyllis had painted them.

The only articles of furniture were several cane-bottomed chairs, a three-legged table, and an old-fashioned square piano—evidently a relic of better days. The fire-place was painted white and was filled with fresh green pine boughs. On the mantel were two white china vases, in which Phoebe quickly arranged her roses, their glowing beauty giving a touch of brightness to the poor plain room.

Under glass cases on the mantel, table, and piano, stood bunches of variegated wax flowers, while on the walls hung many gay hand-painted pictures—seemingly the work of a talented, though poorly taught, child.

Miss Phyllis led them to seats near the window. They saw spread out the work upon which she had been engaged when the sound of their automobile had attracted her attention. On the window-sill, on the table, and on one or two chairs, were the

materials from which she was busily making more wax flowers.

"Do not let us interrupt you," said Phoebe, while Richard wondered what she was going to do with more flowers.

"Well, if you don't mind, I will go on," she said, "as I can work and talk at the same time, and I am so interested in getting this cluster of trumpet-flowers before they wilt."

Then they saw that with painstaking care and no mean ability she was copying in wax a cluster of glowing trumpet-flowers.

"Where do you get your wax?" Richard asked, with characteristic curiosity, after having watched the slender fingers for some minutes in silence while the ladies chatted.

"Oh, I get it from the bees, and I bleach and dye it to suit myself. Then I copy all the fruit and flowers I can lay my hands on, and often when I set a bunch of flowers by this window it fools the humming-birds and the bees!" She laughed with the pleasure of a child.

"Where did you take lessons?" he again asked.

"I never took any lessons," she replied. "I never even saw any one do this kind of work in my life, but somehow it seems to come natural to me."

Phoebe saw him looking around the walls at the pictures. He caught her eye and they smiled at each other with a smile of understanding. Phoebe dropped her eyes and Richard suddenly grew grave.

"Tell Mr. Carey about the painting, Miss Phyllis," urged Phoebe, after a while.

"Well, I don't know that there is much to tell," she answered, "except that I love to do it. I took it up after my mother died, Mr. Carey. It gave me something to think about. I really never had any lessons, and I never saw a real paint-brush nor a piece of canvas in my life. I order the tubes of paint, but I make every thing else that I use, and I copy all the pretty picture cards that I see. Just now I am out of canvas, so I have no painting on hand."

"You don't mean to say that you make your own canvas too?" he asked in amazement.

She laughed with girlish pleasure, and then answered: "Well, you see, it isn't *truly* canvas. It is just coarse cotton cloth treated chemically, so as to make it tight and smooth. I found a formula in an old chemistry, and it serves perfectly."

"Just then an old clock behind the door struck eleven, and she rose hastily, saying, "Here I have been talking about my own affairs, while you both must be famishing."

Phoebe started to demur, but a look of such childish disappointment came into Miss Phyllis' beautiful eyes that she readily consented to stay to lunch.

"It is nearly a year since anybody took a meal with me, and it is so lonely to eat by myself, that often I don't have anything," Miss Phyllis said.

"Then let us help you," cried Phoebe. "I'll set the table and Mr. Carey can do the carving."

She looked at him roguishly as she spoke, and he suddenly felt very happy.

"No," said Miss Phyllis, "I don't need any help. Phoebe, you take Mr. Carey out and show him the grove and my bees. I will call you when I am ready."

They walked down to the beehives together. Phoebe called back to tell Miss Phyllis that there were some things in the basket that might help her out with the lunch. Then they stood together in the grove, and strolled about under the great trees, listening to all the wonderful music of the woods.

There were many questions on the tip of Richard's tongue, but he forbore to ask them. Phoebe was quiet and gentle, and he was full of a delicious content. He felt that he would be satisfied to stay forever in the quiet woods. He really had not known before how much he loved the country. In what seemed to him an incredibly short time they heard Miss Phyllis calling, and Phoebe turned to go in.

Miss Phyllis had arranged a little table under the window with places laid for three. There was a snowy cloth, and the center of the table was graced by her choicest bunch of wax flowers. The menu was a dish of golden honey, a plate of hot corn biscuit, and one new-laid egg for each person.

A pot of tea steamed fragrantly; in each plate was a nest of juicy red plums.

Notwithstanding the fact that Miss Phyllis' guests were not accustomed to wax flowers as centerpieces, they enjoyed the meal as only city persons can enjoy the simplest country fare. Miss Phyllis was a gracious and attentive hostess, solicitous always, but she never once apologized for not being able to give to them a more lavish lunch.

She skilfully led them to speak of their own plans; then, becoming less personal, she entered into a spirited discussion of politics and of the latest topics of general interest. Richard looked surprised, but said nothing.

Shortly after the meal, Phoebe rose, saying that they were expected back in Melrose. Miss Phyllis excused herself from the room, and presently returned with two beautiful pieces of silk tatting. One piece she gave to Phoebe, who thanked her warmly; then, turning to Richard, she gave to him the other, saying it was for his sweetheart—a souvenir of the south for him to take back to her.

Poor Richard blushed guiltily. It was the first time that day that Minerva Chippendale had crossed his mind!

Phoebe volunteered to sit by him on the homeward ride; and, when he helped her in, again that delicious thrill of elation passed through him. They turned to wave a last good-bye to Miss Phyllis when

they reached the big gate, but she did not see them. Through the open window they could see her soft old face, earnest and absorbed as she lovingly put the finishing touches to a huge bunch of scarlet trumpet-flowers.

Richard drove slowly homeward, and Phoebe told him part of Miss Phyllis' history. She had been engaged to be married to a young soldier, who had been killed in the war. No one had ever been able to get her to come to Melrose on a visit, though she had been invited frequently. She had never been there since the day she saw her lover march away to the war, over forty years ago. Now, she never went any farther from her home than to the little church, with the God's acre attached, that they had passed. Every one of her family was buried there.

"And the lover, where was he buried?" asked Richard, feeling strangely sorry for this young Confederate soldier that had been so near to happiness.

"In the trenches at Gettysburg," Phoebe answered softly. "They sent his Bible and a lock of her own hair to her. That is all she has to help her to remember."

"She must have felt it an impertinence for me to come there," cried Richard, "but I did not know."

"No, no," said Phoebe gently; "she is very broad, and I am sure she enjoyed meeting you. She reads so much that she could not remain narrow, if she tried."

Just then they saw the tall chimneys of Maplewood looming up, and they reached home in good time for William to take the car down for Paul. As Richard helped Phoebe out, she thanked him lightly for having given up his morning to her pleasure.

He replied gently: "Do not thank me. I have thoroughly enjoyed my holiday."

CHAPTER X

After the visit to Miss Phyllis Phoebe was much more friendly in her manner toward Richard, and he fell into the habit of behaving very much as if he were at home. The weather grew steadily warmer and warmer, and Paul came home to dinner less and less often. One day about the first of June Richard noticed that the boys left the dining-room after dinner each with an arm around Phoebe's waist.

"The rascals are begging for something," he thought. But he could form no idea as to what it was.

The library was warm during the first hours of the afternoon, when the sun was upon it. Richard had fallen into the habit of taking a book into the garden after dinner and of sitting there until the shadows began to lengthen. In the afternoon Phoebe always disappeared with a fan and a book. She came down later, looking cool and fresh, and usually wearing white. The boys generally played ball or went to ride.

On this particular afternoon Richard took his book and went out in search of a cool spot. He walked restlessly about the garden for a short time,

but it was blazing hot. He cast about for a cooler place. In a far corner, at the back of the garden, there was a clump of big trees. He decided to go there and sit in the dense shade. To his great pleasure he found an ingeniously contrived home-made hammock, furnished with a cushion or two. It was stretched in a secluded corner.

“Ah!” thought he, “this is just made for Richard.”

He stretched himself comfortably in it. Almost instantly he fell asleep, for he had been sleeping badly of late. The warm weather made him restless, he thought. Suddenly he was startled by hearing voices very near him, saying:

“Mother! There is Mr. Carey.”

“Hush, Clay! He is asleep. He will not see us!”

“Anyway, Paul, it doesn’t matter. We have on our bathing-suits.”

“S-s-s-h, boys, don’t wake Mr. Carey,” said Phoebe.

This was too much for Richard; he just must see what was going on, so he opened his eyes. But he could not see.

“Pshaw!” he thought. He tried to turn his head carefully, but one of the pillows fell out. Phoebe and the boys were busy, however, and did not notice him.

Just on the other side of a tall hedge of oleanders, which were full of pink and white buds, he could see an oblong pool of clear, shining water. He won-

dered that he had not noticed it before; then he remembered that he had noticed a sound as of running water before he went to sleep, but had paid no particular attention to it. He had never been in this part of the garden until this afternoon.

The pool was irregular in shape, and the edges had been carefully built up with rock, from the crevices of which grew grasses and ferns and various little water-plants. At one end there was a mat of broad green leaves, and on top of it, gently stirred by the water as it flowed, rocked hundreds of snowy water-lilies. At the other end the white sand of the bottom could be seen through the clear, amber water. There was no visible outlet, but there was a low murmur of running water as though through some underground passage.

What interested Richard most, however, was the little comedy being enacted there. Under one of the great elms that overhung the pool, on a rustic seat, sat Phoebe, her hair tumbled, the collar to her morning-dress tucked in, her face beaming with pleasure. In the pool, in bright striped cotton bathing-suits, were the two boys, with their beautiful young limbs bare. On opposite banks were Hester and William, grinning with affectionate delight. Running round and round, as if they did not know what to make of the situation, were the two puppies.

Then commenced a battle royal, when each boy contended for the possession of the pool. Such splashing and spluttering! Such shrieking of boys

and barking of puppies! William laughed until he lay down and rolled over on the ground.

They had forgotten all about Richard Carey, and he looked as much as he wished. Presently Phoebe, who seemed to be master of ceremonies, called time on the contestants, and told them that they must try to swim for a little while. So, amidst much sputtering and struggling and calling of directions by Phoebe and Hester and William, to which Richard could scarcely refrain from adding his voice, for he had been a champion swimmer at Yale, the boys managed to struggle across the pool once or twice.

Then the puppies were brought to be washed, much against their wills, for as fast as William threw them in on one side they swam frantically out on the other only to be captured and sent back by Hester. By this time the boys were laughing so that they were too weak to do anything but hold on to each other and fall about in the water. At this stage of the proceedings everything in the vicinity had had a shower bath, and even Richard, from his place of vantage behind the hedge, had been well sprinkled. William's shirt was wet, Hester's dress was wet, the puppies were wet, and even the little curls around Phoebe's face were glistening with drops of water.

Richard forgot all about caution, and sat up. Immediately there was a yell of delight from the

boys, who sent a rain of water in his direction. As he did not wish to be soaked he ran to the house.

Later in the afternoon as he worked his mind kept reverting to the pretty incident of the afternoon, and he kept thinking of Mrs. Hamilton's sweet appearance when her face lighted up and her habitual gravity was dispelled.

At the tea-table there was much gay discussion of the contest of the afternoon, and Richard delighted the boys by offering to coach them in swimming, if they cared to have him do so, and by telling them that he had belonged to the club at Yale. They were so boisterous in their manifestations of delight that Phoebe had to reprimand them, and had to remind them more than once that they were at the table.

Paul, looking very tired and worn, came in while they were at tea, but the boys' account of the afternoon and Phoebe's merry talk soon brightened him up.

Richard asked how such a pool happened to be on the place. Paul told him that, when Maplewood was a great plantation long before the war, at the place where the pool then was there had been two big springs, fed from underground. In those days one had been used as a watering-place for the stock: the other had been a wash-hole, where the slaves washed themselves and their clothes.

“Last year,” Paul continued, “when we came to Maplewood, I had the two holes dug into one, and

the bottom cleaned out and filled with white sand—for the boys. I wished to clear out the whole thing, but Phoebe begged so hard for the water-lilies that I had to leave them."

He looked smilingly and affectionately at Phoebe as he spoke. The look and the tone had the effect of irritating Richard. He could not have told why, except that he could have no respect for a man that lived as he knew that Paul was living. However, he had stopped puzzling his brain over Paul and Phoebe's relations, and he was really beginning to enjoy the southern life very much.

Neither Phoebe nor Richard knew how it had begun, but it had become the accepted thing for him to carry the tray for her each morning as she went to Mammy Linda's. He had teasingly asked her, more than once, to introduce him to this member of her family that was yet, not her equal. But she would never let him go with her into Mammy Linda's house. One morning, however, Mammy Linda heard his voice outside, and insisted that he should come in. Paul and Clay had told her that he was teaching them to swim.

Phoebe invited him in rather reluctantly Richard thought; but this southern life was so new and strange that he was curious to try everything that was a part of it, and he went in. The little room had every comfort, though its furnishings were of the simplest kind.

The old woman herself was spotlessly clean and

neat. She drew Phoebe down quite near her sightless eyes, and passed her hands tenderly over the head, the face, and the hands, then over the whole tall figure of the lovely woman that stooped over her.

"How Mammy chile, to-day?" she murmured; "she well?"

When this trying ordeal was over, Phoebe turned to Richard and, with a mischievous smile, said, "Your turn now!" Then turning to Mammy Linda, she said, "Mammy, this is Mr. Carey. You asked him to come in, you know."

Then Richard had to stand the ordeal of being handled, and he did not like it, as Phoebe could tell from his face. He almost wished he had not been so anxious to go in.

While this little scene was being enacted Phoebe deftly arranged the tray, so that she could help the old woman with her breakfast. Then Richard saw a touching and beautiful sight. The tall, noble-looking gentlewoman patiently and gently helped the old blind servant to her breakfast, and talked pleasantly and kindly to her the while.

When Mammy had finished, Phoebe rose to go, but the old woman caught her by her dress and whined, "Ent you gwine sing for Mammy, chile?"

Phoebe looked embarrassed, and said, "Not to-day, Mammy; I haven't time."

The old woman began to whimper, and Phoebe had to sing to soothe her. Softly and sweetly she

sang one of the oldest and simplest hymns, and when she had finished Mammy Linda slept like a tired child.

Rising softly, Phoebe covered the tray, then, motioning to Richard to follow her, she slipped out.

"How long have you been doing this?" he asked reverently.

"I hardly know. Let me see," answered Phoebe reflectively; "Mammy got too blind to go round by herself when the boys were eight, and she has been helpless for about three years."

She changed the subject quickly, and talked no more about Mammy Linda. Richard felt that some of his preconceived ideas needed readjusting.

CHAPTER XI

Richard had been working at the books for over a month, and was getting on very well considering the fact that he had to pin his attention to the task. Paul had set no time in which the work must be completed; but Richard had another engagement for August, and he felt that he must finish this work as soon as possible.

For some reason he could not settle down and put his heart into his work. A restlessness such as he had never before known possessed him. He that had been accustomed to sleep soundly found himself wakeful and restless and often oppressed with a feeling of despairing loneliness. In daylight his nerves seemed to be strained to the highest pitch. He found himself listening feverishly to every sound in the quiet house.

He thought constantly of Phoebe, and when he could not hear her nor see her he found himself wondering intently what she was doing or where she was. When she went into the drawing-room to sing, he no longer made any pretence of working, but he, too, went in, and sat quietly near her until she had finished.

The only work that he did that was satisfactory to

himself, was when Phoebe came, as she frequently did, and offered to help him. She was so sweet and gentle, and so thoroughly capable that he enjoyed working with her; and her being with him gave him a feeling of rest and companionship such as he had never before known.

One day she came in and found him packing the books that needed to be re-bound. It was hot, dusty work, and all the morning he had been restless and longing for something, he knew not what. When she came in wearing a cool thin muslin dress of some nondescript color and bringing a frosted pitcher of iced milk, he could have blessed her. He was so pleased that again Phoebe had the queer feeling that told her that he admired her. This thought gave her a sense of exhilaration such as she had not known in many a year. It was pleasant to have this good-looking, intelligent man think well of her, and she enjoyed his admiration. In some way their conversation turned to Boston.

“By the way,” she said, “you have never told me about your fiancée. Is she pretty? Clever? or both?”

“Oh, she is pretty enough, and clever enough, too, I dare say,” he answered indifferently.

“Well!” laughed Phoebe, “you don’t sound very enthusiastic. I am glad that she doesn’t hear you.”

Richard smiled. “I guess I am enthusiastic enough. I never was an ardent lover. But she doesn’t expect it. She isn’t that kind,” he answered.

"I don't see how in the world you ever got her to say she would marry you, if you talked to her like that," remonstrated Phoebe. "All women love to be loved! They are not natural otherwise."

"Anyway, I am not gifted when it comes to talking love. I'd a great deal rather go somewhere or read a good book."

Phoebe looked at him an instant as if weighing something, then she rose to go.

"I am afraid that you don't know very much about love," she said.

After she left, Richard kept wondering what she had meant by that remark. Did she care so much herself that she thought everybody else had to feel the same way? It irritated him to think that she made no secret about knowing what love was.

During the next few days some subtle change took place in Phoebe. She was a new and radiant creature. Instead of being dignified and sedate she was girlish and merry. She dressed her hair in a more youthful style. She took pains with her figure. She wore her most becoming gowns. She moved lightly and often sang as she went about the house. She smiled when alone as one having pleasant thoughts. Even the boys noticed the difference in her, and one day, in Richard's presence, Clay threw his arms impetuously around her and kissed her on the lips.

"Oh, mother!" he said; "you are so beautiful. I love you."

Phoebe glanced quickly at Richard, and was surprised to see him looking at Clay as if he had detected the child in an impertinence. Richard turned quickly and left the room without saying a word. Shortly afterward Phoebe saw him walking briskly toward the country, though it was still early and the afternoon was very warm.

Late that afternoon Paul came to take Phoebe and the boys for a ride in the automobile. It was such an unusual treat that Phoebe beamed with pleasure. She did not care specially for automobiling in itself, and when she had to go alone she never used the car except for convenience. She had always loved a good horse, either to ride or to drive; and during all the years that they had lived at the little house Paul had felt they could not afford to keep a horse. Phoebe had not driven until after Miss McClintock's death, and even yet she had not ridden horseback.

It was quite a different matter, though, to go automobiling with Paul, when he himself drove the automobile. He was an excellent driver, and with him Phoebe always had a delightful feeling of exhilaration in speeding along over the country roads, past club-houses, farm-houses, fields, lanes, river, until out, far, far out, they came to the woods. She always asked him to go slowly then, so that she could smell the pines, she said.

Paul always smiled indulgently at her at such

times, and always rallied her on having been reared in the country.

This afternoon, as they were nearing the city they recognized a tall, lean figure ahead of them by the roadside. It was Richard. He walked slowly as if weary. Paul halted the car near-by and asked him if he would ride home. He came forward a little unwillingly, Phoebe thought. When he saw that she was in the tonneau by herself the shadow lifted from his eyes and he climbed in pleasantly enough.

CHAPTER XII

Phoebe was enjoying herself immensely. All her girlish coquetry came back. She delighted Paul, she charmed the boys, she entranced Richard. For the first time in many years she was living again in an atmosphere of admiration and love.

All her life she had been what might be called a man's woman. Men had turned as naturally to her as the needle to the pole. Her father had idolized her and made a companion of her as far back as she could remember. Her brothers had worshiped her, and in their scheme of the universe nothing was complete without her. As she grew older all men admired her, and many had loved her devotedly. She could not remember the time when she found out that she coul turn them as she willed ; and to her praise be it said she had never used her beauty nor her influence except in a way that was high and ennobling.

Paul was a man of the highest integrity, one that would have died at the stake for principle ; yet one that, having this good and beautiful woman for his wife, made the keeping of her love and happiness merely incidental to the business of life.

It was well for him that Phoebe Middleton's

childhood had been spent in such a way as to develop true nobility of thought and sentiment, and that, though she might slip and come near falling, yet she would not "blind her soul with clay." It was well for him that Richard Carey was pure and clean, and that the thought of loving another man's wife did not find ready entrance into his honest brain.

Phoebe at this time was not conscious of any evil. She thought of Paul just as lovingly and possibly just as often as usual, but for the first time in their married life, she failed to miss him, when, as so frequently happened, he failed to come home. And once or twice, when she and Richard had some plan for the evening, she was a little relieved when he failed to appear. Dangerous symptoms truly! And Phoebe's level head and her enlightened conscience would quickly have recognized them as such, had her vanity been less flattered and had she stopped to analyze the situation.

She and Richard sang together almost every evening, for she had discovered that he had a voice of rare sweetness and some cultivation. The sound of their two voices, sweetly blended in one song, often made the wayfarer stop to listen.

Sometimes they read, for Phoebe had a rare and delightful culture that was charming to a man whose reading had been broad. Sometimes he told her of his life, and of places that he had been. They found that they both admired Wagner's music above all

things, and that each of them had enjoyed a season of his opera in New York. The more they talked the more they found that their tastes were similar.

Phoebe was more to blame than Richard. She was married and she *knew*, while as yet he did not know that he loved her. She could not tell exactly when the knowledge came to her that this charming, intelligent man loved her; but sometimes, in thinking it over, she thought it must have been the first day that she saw him looking at her as she crossed the yard.

Of course, she should have withheld herself entirely from his society as soon as she found that he loved her. But she did not. This is not a story of what might have happened, but of what really did happen, and however dark the picture it must be set down.

The only extenuating circumstances lie in Phoebe's absolute purity of thought, in the loneliness of her married life, and in her great hunger for appreciation and for loving companionship.

The condition that had come about would have been impossible under other circumstances, but Richard's being a stranger, and his coming at an unguarded moment into the innermost circle of her home caused the trouble that came to them both.

To the people of Melrose Phoebe was Phoebe Hamilton, good and beautiful, the fondly beloved wife of Paul Hamilton, one of the leading and most successful business men in the south. No man in

Melrose had ever dreamed of looking with other than respectfully admiring eyes in her direction. But to Richard Carey, coming into her home as he did, she was a beautiful woman, still young, lonely and neglected, with a husband that openly acknowledged that he was unfaithful to her.

No woman is old at forty, unless she chooses to be, and Phoebe's quiet life had greatly preserved her youthful appearance. Her eyes were still dewy, her lips and cheeks soft and pink, while the gray at her temples only added to the freshness and delicacy of her coloring. She had always been dainty in her dress and she had always been careful of her hands. Now she took particular pains to look charming. She was glorious in the full perfection of her midsummer beauty.

Paul looked at her with new pride and admiration, and several times complimented her on her lovely appearance, but he did it lightly and carelessly, little dreaming that Richard Carey complimented, not with the lips, it is true, but with eyes that caressed.

Phoebe was a woman ripe and wise. She knew that she danced with careless, happy feet upon the very brink of sin. Those that have been tempted, will pity her! Those that have never been must close this book and lay it aside. It is not written for them.

Phoebe knew that daily Richard Carey was becoming more and more deeply and passionately in love with her, and with her woman's intuition, she

also knew that he had placed her on a pedestal, that the thing that most attracted him was what he conceived to be her absolute purity and openness. So she walked on guard before him, never letting him suspect for one moment that she knew that he cared for her. She treated him with a sweet, open, yet tender, friendship that bound him to her with the strongest ties of a pure and hopeless love. He never at this time dreamed that he loved her, nor of any evil in connection with her. He only knew that in her sweet, gentle presence he lived, and when she was away he *waited*. He did not stop to analyze further.

He enjoyed each golden day in her presence, and when night came he was no longer restless, but slept sweetly so as to be ready for the morrow.

For the first time in all Phoebe Hamilton's sweet, pure, protected life she was brought face to face with temptation and sin. Did it appall her? No. Did she shrink from it? No, she hugged it to her with greedy arms that had long been empty. She gloated over it in secret.

Each glance of Richard's tender eyes, each touch of his strong hand, told her of his love, and she gloried in it. It was so sweet to be loved. She had been hungry for it so long!

Certain it was that at this time neither she nor Richard had any thought of Sin, but were living in a Fool's Paradise of exquisite enjoyment in the present.

CHAPTER XIII

The swimming lessons progressed finely, and the boys had learned all that Richard could teach them in so small a pool. They were sighing for pastures new and other worlds to conquer, and kept urging Phoebe to let them go to the river.

The river, however, was a broad, bold stream, and Phoebe would not consent. One day the subject was brought up at dinner when Paul was present, and he told them if Phoebe did not object he would take them in the automobile to the ford some miles above Melrose. Phoebe was prevailed upon to give her consent to this, though, Richard thought, she did it reluctantly. After dinner the two men and the two boys set out, equipped with bathing-suits and fishing-tackle.

Phoebe looked at them wistfully when they went off, then she turned and went back into the house. On the hall-table was the mail, which the men had overlooked in their hurry to get off. There were several letters for Richard—one was written on dainty paper that was stamped with a monogram.

Phoebe smiled as she thought how many like it she had seen in Richard's mail since he came to

Maplewood. For a girl that did not expect to be made love to this young lady certainly believed in keeping herself well in mind, thought Phoebe, and then she smiled again, a little.

Among her own letters was one with a foreign postmark, which she immediately recognized as being from Clay. Gathering all her letters up she ran up-stairs to her room. A letter from Clay was becoming an increasingly rare treat as the years rolled by, and she was delighted to see that this was a thick one. His letters always touched the very highest chord in her being, and this afternoon she could not keep back the tears as she read. He spoke in simple, unaffected terms of the life that he was living, and told of the results of his work with sincere thankfulness and joy. Clay's fine attitude toward his work gave a pin-prick to Phoebe's self-esteem; she felt a vague sense of dissatisfaction with herself that made her uncomfortable as she read. Suppose Clay knew of the vain way in which she had been living for the past few weeks.

Contrasted with his life of noble self-sacrifice hers looked *black*. Her higher aspirations were touched, and her inclination was to fall on her knees and plead for forgiveness. She even tried to pray, but her prayer did not seem to rise. She knew why quite well. She knew that she had not surrendered self, and that she was trying to salve her conscience by praying to be forgiven for a sin that she was not willing to give up. But it was so sweet to be loved!

She could not give it up yet. This delicious cup that she had barely tasted! Paul loved her, of course, but with him it was different. He was so absolutely accustomed to her, and he was so engrossed in business that he hardly ever gave her a thought during business hours.

But Richard. Ah, Richard showed in a hundred gentle, tender ways each day that he thought of her constantly. She was purblind and reckless as yet, and gave no thought to his pain when he should come to know.

She felt restless and dissatisfied with herself, so she dressed rather earlier than usual and went down-stairs. The afternoon was very warm, and the fragrance from the garden was most inviting. Nearly all the early roses were withered and gone, but a few of later varieties were still blooming, and they seemed to make up in sweetness for what they lacked in number.

She strolled about aimlessly for a while, with Clay's letter hidden in the bosom of her dress. Then an idea occurred to her. She and William would arrange the tea-table in the garden, and have something unusually tempting for the men and boys to eat when they came in. She immediately set about her preparations. When they came home just as the full moon was rising over the city and flooding the garden with its silvery light, she had everything in readiness. She had even stuck a red rose in her own dark hair.

Paul had time only to drink hastily a glass of iced tea, and then he had to rush back to the office to make up the time that he had given to the boys.

Richard and the boys did full justice to her dainties, however, and Phoebe felt repaid for her trouble in preparing them.

The boys had had a glorious afternoon, and each had performed some wonderful feats in swimming. Directly after tea they ran off to tell Mammy Linda and Hester all about the afternoon's performance.

The effect of Clay's letter had not entirely worn off, and Phoebe was looking grave. Her voice had the plaintive note in it that always went straight to Richard's heart. Her eyes too looked a little heavy as if she had been crying.

Richard noticed instantly that something had happened to distress her, and he harassed himself by trying to think what it could be. Had she really minded the boys' going to the river? Had she thought he and Paul were two brutes for taking them, when they knew it made her anxious? Possibly she had been alarmed because they stayed out so late. All kinds of conjectures passed through his mind, and he tried by every gentle art of which he was master to divert her mind and to help her regain her merry spirits.

He was successful, for as they rose from the table she was laughing gaily.

Just as they rose a letter with a foreign post-mark and addressed in a man's bold handwriting

slipped from the front of her dress and dropped at his feet. As he picked it up and handed it back to her he could not help seeing it. What man could be writing to her, and what country had a postmark like that, he asked himself. A singular feeling, that was altogether new, took possession of him. He seemed to know by intuition that the man had no right to write to her. Why did she allow it, he wondered. He felt a painful degree of curiosity about the letter. As he handed it back to her the shadow came back to her eyes, and she tucked it away carefully.

Instead of going into the house, he proposed that they should walk about a little. Presently they strolled to the rustic seat near the pool. The great elm cast a cool, dark shade where they sat; the pool shone in the moonlight, and on its gently rippling surface a myriad of half-closed water-lilies rocked. The soft underground flow of the water made a soothing murmur, but Richard's heart was not at rest. Why would she let this foreigner write to her? Who could he be? Perhaps he was some one that distressed her, and she did not know how to deal with him. He wished that she would tell him what troubled her. He felt sure that he could help her, if she would. He could not ask her though, for tonight she seemed unapproachable and far-away.

She sat quietly in the shadow for a few minutes, and then she asked:

“Did you get your letters? There were several.”

Then she added demurely: "One was from the fiancée. You see I have learned to know her monogram."

"Oh, well," said Richard carelessly, "I guess they'll wait. . . . You seem to have a letter, too."

"Yes," said Phoebe gently, with a little sobbing catch in her breath; "mine is from Clay."

"Who is Clay?" he asked quickly.

Then she told him of the dear twin brother, who had been away for over fifteen years. Her eyes filled with tears and her sweet voice trembled as she talked tenderly of him, and Richard felt his own eyes grow misty in sympathy. He suddenly felt kindly to all the world; his vague sense of discomfort was entirely dispelled. After a while they went into the house, and Phoebe went to her room. Richard took his mail into the library.

CHAPTER XIV

The next morning at breakfast Phoebe was late. When the others went into the dining-room, her chair was vacant and there was no sign of her anywhere. Richard felt as if the sun had suddenly gone under a cloud. That which made the morning meal so attractive at Maplewood was missing.

Paul asked the boys casually if their mother was ill. He had been since daylight in a little room that he used as a study and he had not seen Phoebe.

The boys did not know why she was late, and the subject was dropped. But Richard chafed. Why, he thought, did not some of them go and find out? Phoebe—he did not know when he had commenced to think of her as Phoebe—was usually punctual, and not at all given to indulging herself at the expense of the comfort and pleasure of her family. She must be ill. He fumed inwardly, while they all sat and ate their breakfast as if there was nothing the matter. Paul read the paper, the boys talked about baseball. Richard was indignant! “What on earth is the matter with me?” he asked himself. It was none of his business if they chose to neglect Phoebe, but for some reason inexplicable to himself he seemed to resent their doing so very much.

Paul had nearly finished his coffee, when suddenly Phoebe came into the room, looking radiant. She wore a dress of soft thin white material; her hair was completely hidden by a wide black hat trimmed with a wreath of crimson roses. In her hand she carried a bunch of the same glowing flowers.

"Why," she exclaimed, "am I late?"

As she came in, the sunshine seemed to fill the room.

"I made William take me down town," she went on, "and I was kept waiting longer than I thought. It is so warm to shop later in the day."

She sat down at the table with her hat on as she spoke, and helped herself to fruit. Paul excused himself, and rose to go; but glancing at Phoebe, he saw how exceptionally sweet and girlish she looked. He looked lovingly at her and put his hand softly on her cheek and would have kissed her, had not Richard been present. She blushed prettily and looked lovelier than ever. The boys rushed out to ride with their father to the office, and Richard and Phoebe were left alone. She could scarcely keep from showing self-consciousness, so adoring was his look.

"I wonder," he said softly, "if you have any idea of how beautiful you are, or if you, like Mr. Hamilton and the boys, are used to it!"

It was the first time he had ever paid her an open compliment and she chose to ignore it.

"Oh, Paul and the boys are all right. They miss me when I am away, even if they don't appreciate me when I am about," she said lightly.

Just as she spoke the 'phone rang, and she asked Richard if he would answer it for her. He had finished breakfast, and Hester was busy.

"It is Long Distance, for you, Mrs. Hamilton. I can't quite make out where from—King's something or other," he called.

"All right," said Phoebe, "I'll come. I suspect it is Bruce at King's Quarter."

And so it turned out to be. Little Phoebe was seriously ill, Bruce said, and Annie was worn out with nursing, and could she come to them?

It was settled at once that Phoebe would go down to Bruce's on the eleven o'clock train.

"Who will see you off?" Richard presently asked; "Mr. Hamilton, or the boys?"

"Neither," answered Phoebe; "Paul couldn't possibly take the time, and the boys have gone to the baseball park to practice. I'll make William take me down in the car."

There were some strangers in the city to whom Paul felt that he must show some attention. He had sent them to ride in the car, and William did not get home in time to take Phoebe to the station. She decided to go on the street-car, but when she came down, ready to go, she found that Richard had hitched Gary to the buggy and was waiting for her at the front steps. The little act of thoughtfulness

touched her inexpressibly, and her manner was very gentle and sweet to him during the short drive to the station.

"I tried to 'phone to Paul," she said presently, "but he was busy and couldn't answer, and I did not have time to wait. I left a little note for him. Please tell him and the boys good-bye for me, and tell him how kind you have been."

She lifted her eyes to his but she had to let them drop because of what she saw there. Pity, love, renunciation,—all mingled. He did not know that this was so, but she knew. Her hand lingered in his for one instant, then the whistle blew, and in a few seconds she was gone. Richard got into the buggy and drove slowly back to Maplewood. All that day and the next and the next his work dragged. On the fourth day he spent most of the time with his head in his hands, only straightening up and attempting to look natural when he heard some one coming. His eyes were large and hard and bright. His face looked haggard and old.

Paul was preoccupied with business affairs and did not notice Richard, but the boys thought that he must be ill, and they wished that their mother had been there to doctor him. The truth is that poor Richard had found out! He knew now where he had been walking, all unconsciously, ever since he had first seen Phoebe. He knew why she had interested him so strangely from the very first. He

loved her! He loved her! He loved her! God help him! God help him! He loved her!

It seemed to him that every fibre of his being was bound up in her. And she could be nothing to him. Nothing! She was pure and good, and she had no idea of what he was suffering. She would, he told himself, be horrified that he had desecrated her marriage vows by even thinking of love in connection with her.

He determined to hurry with the work and get away before she came home. It was hard to work when he was so miserable, for he was not used to pain. All his life it had seemed good to him to be alive and well, but he had never dreamed of such a thing as this. He worked feverishly all day, and at night he walked sometimes until the light of day was paling the stars in the east.

CHAPTER XV

After a day and a night of this misery his fighting blood stirred. Why should he give her up, he thought. Her husband was untrue to her. Surely even here in the south where some of the states did not recognize divorce at all it would be possible for her to obtain her freedom for a cause so grievous as that.

Would she do it? That was the question! Did she care for him? She was so sweet, so guarded, so honorable, so pure, that such a thought had probably never entered her head, he told himself. Very well, he would put it there. He would win her, if he could.

But he was not happy in this decision. He knew that he had made up his mind to dishonor, for as a Catholic he had been trained not to recognize divorce for any cause whatever. Of course, it was different when it came to his own happiness, however, and he reasoned himself into claiming that there were extenuating circumstances.

It would be a relief to have some one to talk things over with, he thought. He wished for Oliver, whose head was always level, and who would

have helped him to see clearly. He even tried to write to Oliver, but what he had to say did not look well on paper. He tore the letter up. Ah, he knew what he would do! He would go to Father Bradwell, and in a confession tell him the whole miserable story, and see what he would advise him to do. He had heard from a number of sources of this priest's purity of life and breadth of intellect, and he decided to go to confession.

One evening just at dusk, he slipped into the little confessional and fell on his knees. He poured out the whole story without reservation and without any attempt at extenuation. He told of his love, of his misery of renunciation, of his determination to have her at all costs.

The old priest waited until he had poured out all, then very gently, but firmly, told him his duty, told him that unlawful love was a grievous fault, but that it could be overcome. He told Richard that he must not voluntarily look at the woman, nor speak with her, nor touch her. He must not even think of her. To do so was sin. He told him that as a son of the Church he knew that divorce was unlawful. Even though it was recognized by the State, it was not recognized by the Church, and divorced persons that married again lived in a state of unholy love.

Then the old man lifted up his voice and prayed for help for this miserable and sorely tempted

brother. When Richard got up and came away there was the agony of renunciation in his soul.

All that night he could not sleep, and during most of it he worked as if his task must be finished by morning.

“O God!” he thought, “if I could only finish and get away before she comes back with her gentle, merry ways and her sweet, questioning eyes.”

The home life went on as usual. Paul came and went, less frequently it is true than when Phoebe was at home, but still he was at home a part of each day. The boys took Mammy’s breakfast to her and Hester looked after the housekeeping, but the music was gone from the home.

Richard worked like a galley-slave and accomplished a great deal.

And what of Phoebe during all this time? She found little Phoebe very ill; for some days the child required all her thought and attention. She cared for her tenderly and faithfully, but in an absorbed, far-away manner, that made Bruce and Annie wonder.

They thought her lonely life had begun to leave its impress on her, and while they found her gentle, quiet ways soothing, yet they regretted the old merry Phoebe that used to make them laugh.

Truth to tell, Phoebe was obsessed. She thought of herself constantly as a hypothetical third person. What if she should let Richard see at some unguarded moment how interested she was in him?

She could imagine the burning words that he would speak, the look in his eyes! She knew that she did wrong, but she could imagine the bliss of hearing again such words as Paul used to speak to her. The very thought was like a strain of almost forgotten music and she returned to it again and again.

What, she asked herself, if this hypothetical person should be divorced? She knew that divorces were hard to get in the southern states. She did not know exactly what the law was in her own state, never before having been interested in the subject. What if this person went away with Richard? Nothing could be easier. Nobody paid any attention to her going and coming. But *Paul* would not have her then! Then she would stop short and say:

“Phoebe Hamilton, I believe that you are losing your mind! You know you love your own husband. You know you would not be divorced for anything in earth, nor sky, nor sea! Think of your beautiful boys growing up to despise you and acknowledging their relationship to you only by a blush of shame!”

Then she would begin all over again. Did she care for Richard Carey? No, no, a thousand times no! What was the matter then, for she certainly gave to him a great deal of thought?

Ah! she had it now. It was that he loved her, and it was so sweet to be loved. That was it, she was in love with being loved!

Each day, and far into the night, she wearied herself with questioning. The cords were tightening around her, for such speculation as this seemed almost like infidelity to Paul, and she could not control her thoughts.

“God help me,” she would murmur restlessly, and turn her head from side to side on the pillow from which all sleep had fled. But God did not help. Her prayer would not rise. She was not yet willing to give up her sin. She was beginning to see, but not wholly—as yet.

CHAPTER XVI

One morning when nobody was expecting her Phoebe came home. She came up from the station on the street-car, and slipped quietly in before anyone but William, who let her in, knew that she had come.

She ran up to her room, and took off her traveling-dress, and put on a simple rose pink house-dress. Then, having bound her hair in a soft fluffy fashion, she went down-stairs.

She turned naturally into the library as she passed, to speak to Richard. She was amazed at what he had accomplished in the two weeks that she had been away. The work was practically done. A large box from the binders was open near the table in the middle of the floor. Richard was stooping over it busily unpacking and did not hear her enter.

She stood still a moment, smiling, then she spoke, "Are you not going to say that you are glad that I am back, Mr. Carey?"

Richard turned as if he had been struck; then a look of radiant joy came into his face. In a mo-

ment he controlled himself. He turned back to his work, and said in a strained, unnatural voice, "I am very glad to see you back, Mrs. Hamilton."

But he did not look up nor offer to shake hands with her. Phoebe hesitated for a moment, then she walked straight up to him and putting her firm, strong hand under his chin turned his face up until he had to look at her. She never forgot that look nor the agony of the tender, beseeching eyes.

He said no word, but Phoebe's hand dropped, and for the first time in her whole life she was ashamed of what she had done. For the first time his side of the question appealed to her, and she was filled with remorse.

"You are suffering!" she cried, appalled.

"I am suffering," he said desperately, without looking at her, "but there is nothing that anyone can do. . . . I have been a fool!"

He did not speak again, and Phoebe had to be satisfied with this explanation, or lack of one, but all that day she was miserably uncomfortable.

Richard worked desperately. At dinner he told Paul that he hoped to finish and to get away by the first of the next week.

Phoebe listened with a sudden little sinking of the heart. She would miss this man when he was gone. She would miss his pleasant, companionable ways, but most of all she would miss the atmosphere of love with which he had surrounded her lonely life during the past few weeks.

Paul, however, was pleased to know that the work was nearly done, and was too busy to give much attention to details.

The boys did not come in until late, and did not know that Phoebe had come back. When they found that she was there they covered her face with kisses. Paul looked delighted at their joy and Phoebe was delighted to see them. After one or two bearish hugs, however, she put up her hands and pretended that they were tumbling her hair.

She involuntarily glanced at the two men. Paul was looking at the boys with fatherly pride on his fine face, but Richard was looking at her with eyes that hungrily devoured her. He looked quickly away and did not speak to her during dinner.

Again she had a sudden swift sensation of loss. What could she do, she asked herself, what could she do? She had brought pain and misery upon this man. She had thought only of her selfish gratification in being loved. What could she *do*?

All the afternoon she stayed in her room, ostensibly unpacking and arranging her wardrobe—in reality battling with remorse. When it was almost dark she stole out to speak to Mammy Linda.

Richard had tried to work but had failed. His brain refused to do his bidding, and would only reiterate with dull insistence: “She has come back, and I must not look at her nor speak to her!

. . . I must not even listen to her dear voice when she speaks, or laughs, or sings!”

All the afternoon he had struggled with himself, and then he heard her go out to Mammy Linda's. He made a sudden fierce resolve. He was no puppet, he said to himself, to be ordered around by an old priest. He was young and his blood ran warm in his veins! He would at least enjoy her sweet society for the few remaining days that he was here, and then he would drink his bitter cup to the dregs. Quickly smoothing his hair and straightening his tie, he took up his cap and followed Phoebe.

When he got to Mammy Linda's he could hear voices inside, one peevish and fretful, the other soft and soothing. After a time all was still and he walked up and down waiting for Phoebe to come out. Presently she came through the growing darkness, her face and dress showing white through the gloom.

She gave a little start of surprise when she saw him, and her heart gave a quick throb of pleasure. Bareheaded and smiling, he came forward to meet her.

"*I am* glad to see you back, Mrs. Hamilton," he said; "I was a boor this morning. Will you forgive me?"

He held out his hand to her as he spoke. She laid hers in it, immensely relieved. Maybe things were not going to be so difficult after all, she thought. Maybe he did not care as much as she had thought. Maybe it was only her vanity that had made her think that he cared at all.

Quite happy they went into the house together, and nothing more was said about his behavior of the morning.

Paul did not come in until late, and Phoebe and Richard and the boys had a merry tea together.

After tea Phoebe and Richard sang. Never had their voice blended so sweetly, never had they so thoroughly enjoyed singing together. Afterward they sat on the piazza and talked until Paul came in. Richard soon excused himself, but instead of going to his room, he walked toward the country with long, practical strides. Phoebe saw him as he left.

She sat and talked to Paul, who seemed delighted to have her at home again, but all the time her thoughts followed that silent figure striding toward the country through the darkness. For the first time she did not understand Richard. Before this he had been an open page for her to read, but to-night she was baffled when she thought of him.

The night was very warm. Paul and the boys slept on the porch, but Phoebe could not sleep. After trying for a while, she got up and went into her little sewing-room, thinking that she would tire herself by reading. But she could not read. She kept thinking of Richard Carey striding along somewhere under the stars, and she came face to face with herself. She tried to excuse herself for having made him love her by saying to herself that she had not intended to do so. But she got no

peace of mind. She knew that she *had* intended to make him care since the day that she first saw him looking at her through the library window.

She tried to pray for him and for herself, but she could not pray. For the first time in her life her religion was not a comfort to her. Her prayer would not seem to rise. She got no peace of mind, no rest for her weary soul. She was not yet ready to give up her sin, nor to beg for forgiveness. Even yet the thought that Richard loved her was like wine in her blood.

She went over each step of the way again, from the time when he first looked at her as if he were looking for her up to the present time, and she knew absolutely that he loved her. The thought still gave her joy.

What if she loved him? Did she? Would she be willing to go away with him? Would she be divorced for him? What did the Bible say about divorce anyway? She really had never read it carefully. Taking down her little Bible she turned the pages restlessly.

She found Mark 10: 2-12, and read:

“And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting him.

“And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you?

“And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorce, and to put her away.

“And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept.

“But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female.

“For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife;

“And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh.

“What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

“And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter.

“And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her,

“And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.”

She turned again to Matthew 19:9, and read:

“And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.”

She turned the pages feverishly, but could find nothing more directly bearing on the subject.

Why, she thought, if this Bible were true, she could not be divorced except for *one* thing. Her cheeks flamed crimson at the thought, even in the privacy of her own room. If this Bible were true

a divorced woman who married again was a creature of shame! Of Sin!

Horrible thought! Phoebe Hamilton, Paul Hamilton's dearly beloved and honored wife, *That!* Had a bolt of lightning struck at her feet her sudden revulsion of feeling could not have been greater. All her life she had prayed that her heart might be kept pure, and she had been trained to accept the Bible as her guide. She was overcome at the horror and danger of her position, and falling on her knees, all her vanity gone, she prayed to be forgiven for the sake of Him that died for sinners. All night long she wrestled in prayer, begging that for the sake of Christ her sin might be blotted out. When it was nearly dawn she heard Richard come in, and she prayed God's help for him too.

When finally she rose from her knees, she was a chastened and subdued Phoebe. At dawn she fell into a fitful sleep.

When she had gone out Paul had roused just sufficiently to speak a tender word of endearment to her, and then he had slept again.

Phoebe's heart and conscience had been made very tender by the vital experiences of the night. Her eyes filled with tears, in the darkness, and her love for her husband and children welled up a pure stream above her wickedness and folly.

CHAPTER XVII

The next morning Phoebe was very quiet at breakfast. She knew now how heartless and sinful she had been, and she was resolved to do all in her power to rectify the evil. But the evil consequences of evil were not so easily overcome. Richard, too, had fought out his battle in the night, and he meant to have her or die.

While they were still at the table a telegram came for Paul, calling him to New York at once.

"I'll have to go on the 11:30 train," he said, "as even the matter of a few hours is of importance."

Phoebe, who happened to be looking at Richard, saw the look that suddenly leaped into his expressive eyes, and for the first time she was afraid. She followed Paul up-stairs, ostensibly to help him with his packing, but in reality to beg him not to go.

"O Paul!" she cried, "indeed I am not silly. I *need* you. Do not leave me here alone with Mr. Carey. It isn't right."

But Paul only laughed at her.

"Why, I never knew you to be so foolish, Phoebe. There is no reason why you and the boys should not stay here with Carey. He, so far as I can see, is

a perfect gentleman. The boys are nearly grown, and you are no young, foolish thing. It would be nonsense for me to stay on that account. Besides, the business is urgent."

Phoebe played tremulously with the button on the front of his coat, but said nothing more. She knew that if the business was urgent that settled the matter, and she must fight out her battle alone.

After bidding her a loving, but hasty, good-bye, for there were matters that needed attention at the office before he left the city, Paul left Phoebe alone. She lifted her heart in a prayer for guidance, and quickly decided that she would not see Richard at all that day. She stayed in her room and fought the long hard battle all over again.

It was sweet to be loved and admired, she whispered to herself. *It was sweet to be thought of first,* and it had been so long, until now, since she had been first with anyone. She knew Paul loved her, he was tender and sweet always, but she knew quite well that she was not first with him.

During the morning, Richard evidently worked. Phoebe did not go down to dinner, but in the afternoon she could hear him moving restlessly about, and finally, after tea, William brought her the following note :

I have been waiting for you all day. There is something that I must tell you.

R. C.

Phoebe's heart leaped! Should she go? Should she let him tell her? Some of her vanity had returned, but her agony and shame of the night before was too fresh to be put aside. Falling on her knees she again implored that One that never fails to hear when a contrite sinner calls, to guide and protect her and to save her from herself and from Richard.

Shortly afterward Richard heard her come downstairs and leave the house. He hurried out after her, but she stepped on the car just as he was in calling distance and was carried swiftly away. He grew restless and miserable. He had no doubt that she had run away from him; but he did not know why. Surely she did not think he would do her any harm.

Then he blushed guiltily, for he knew that he *had* meant to harm her. He had meant to win her for himself, and in order to do it he had made up his mind to tell her that Paul was untrue. He had meant to blast her trust in her husband and steal her for himself. Suddenly Richard's conduct appeared ghastly in his own eyes, and he too prayed for strength and forgiveness.

As for Phoebe, after she read Richard's note she suddenly understood that her only safety was in flight. She knew that if she yielded and let Richard talk to her she might fall into some grievous fault, and she dared not trust herself. Could she, she asked herself, if she let Richard tell her of his

love, ever look Paul honestly in the face again? Could she ever let him kiss her in perfect faith, if she had listened to another man's burning words of love? Could she even be physically pure, if she let a man other than her husband speak to her words that no married woman should hear?

Her resolve was quickly taken. She would go to Eloise Dawson's and spend the night. Eloise loved her and would be delighted to see her and was never one to ask too many questions. She dressed quickly, and putting a few necessary articles in a bag, she got down just in time to catch the uptown car. She thought that she heard some one hurrying after her, but she did not look back, she stepped on the car that was just then coming. Eloise was delighted to see her and took it as a matter of course that she was lonely without Paul.

Phoebe reached Eloise's in time to put the baby to sleep, and as she held the little soft warm body close to her the feeling of pain and struggle left her; once more her heart was at peace. The next day was Sunday, and as Eloise had one of her bad headaches, Phoebe stayed with the children. She telephoned to let the boys know where she was and to tell them to be sure to go to church. In the afternoon Paul and Clay came up to Eloise's and reported that things were all right at home.

While the boys were out Dr. Carmichael went to Maplewood. Finding the house open but seeing no one about he slipped into the library to see how

it looked. He found Richard Carey there, and was dismayed to see how ill and worn he looked. He had remembered Richard as looking particularly fresh and well when he saw him before.

"Why," he exclaimed, "Mr. Carey, I am afraid you have gotten malaria down here! . . . Does Phoebe give you a net, or have the mosquitoes been troubling you?"

Richard smiled a wan, haggard smile and said, "Mrs. Hamilton does everything for my comfort and pleasure."

Something in Richard's tone or expression threw light on the kind old doctor's mind, and he said:

"Mr. Carey, you are a stranger here. You are in trouble. Tell me about it, and I will gladly help you, if I can. At any rate there will be no harm done."

Richard felt a great tension give way in his brain and his tender eyes became wistful at the tone of kindness in Dr. Carmichael's voice.

Grasping the doctor's hand, he said, "I do not know what you will think of me, but I will tell you."

Then he told the whole sad, painful story from beginning to end. When he had finished the doctor sat perfectly still for a few minutes, then he asked, "What does Phoebe say?"

"Mrs. Hamilton does not know," Richard answered; "I begged her to see me last night, but she

would not, and she went to Mrs. Dawson's for the night."

The old doctor beamed. "I might have known that she was honest," he said. "I would stake my life on her honor. But what made her leave home? Do you suppose she suspected the state of affairs?"

"I do not know. I imagine that I have betrayed a good deal by my manner since she came back, but I have never said a word to her that all the world might not have heard. I would have done so, if she would have seen me last night, however. Honestly, doctor, I would not have dreamed of trying to win her love, if Paul Hamilton had been true to her. I would have left her to her happiness while I bore my pain alone."

The doctor started. "What did you say!" he exclaimed; "Paul Hamilton unfaithful to Phoebe! Why, man, he worships her. How did you ever get such an idea into your head? There is certainly some mistake here."

"I don't see how there can be any mistake," said Richard miserably. "He told me so himself, the first day I was here."

"Told you himself! Told you what? Why, man, you are crazy! Paul Hamilton would lay down his life for Phoebe any day in the year! What did he say that made you think such a thing?"

Then Richard repeated the remark that Paul had made to him the first morning of his stay at Maplewood. Dr. Carmichael laughed heartily.

"Why, he didn't mean one thing by that, except that he is forever and eternally at that office, while Phoebe is here. Have you come here with your Yankee literalness and thought such evil as that of him for more than two months?"

Richard had to smile.

"I have thought it very peculiar at times, I'll admit," owned Richard, "for he always has seemed to love her. Though I hold to it that if he does, he neglects her shamefully. I have been here as you say for over two months, and during that time I could almost count on my fingers the evenings that he has spent with her, or the times that he has taken her out. How was I to know that what he said was just his way of expressing himself, and meant no harm at all?"

"Well," said the doctor, "all this discussion does not help you with your trouble. Now, what can be done about it? I am a practical man and I believe in taking a practical hold of things. I don't in the least blame you for loving Phoebe Hamilton. I would hold that any man was a dolt or a fool that could live in the same house with her for two months and not love her. All I blame you for—is for loving her wrong—"

"No, no," Richard interrupted, "as God is my witness, I have thought no evil in connection with her. She is too pure, too high, for that."

"But you have loved her wrong all the same," persisted the doctor. "You have wished to have her

for your own, and that under the circumstances is wrong. Indeed, under any circumstances it would be wrong, for she is older than you by several years. I have seen many marriages that were unhappy for no other reason than that. It is against nature and God's scheme of things. The male should always be the older and the stronger. Phoebe is beautiful and charming; but even were she unmarried, she would be no fitting mate for you. You should marry a woman at least three years younger than yourself and rear a fine family of children of your own. Forgive me for seeming harsh and abrupt, but I have watched for many years and I know. . . . Love her all you wish, enjoy her all you can, but don't let sentiment come in. Let her be your friend. She makes the sweetest kind.

. . . I am glad you spoke to me, Mr. Carey, and I have no fear that you will not prove yourself a man. You have too good a jaw for that!"

The doctor rose to say good-bye, and Richard, his heart already lighter, shook him warmly by the hand.

"Thank you more than I can tell you, doctor," he said, "for bearing with me; and, believe me, I shall try to profit by your advice. I shall try to show myself a man."

The two men parted, the doctor to carry help and good cheer to some other suffering one, and Richard to try to adjust himself anew.

There was a good deal, he thought, in what the

old doctor had said. If he loved Phoebe right, there could be no harm in his loving her all he wished. He need not have to go away feeling that he could never look lawfully on her sweet face again, that he could never touch her, that he could never be near her any more. "Ah, God!" he thought, "how sweet it would be to feel that I could sometimes be near her without sin!"

CHAPTER XVIII

Phoebe stayed with Eloise until early Monday morning; then she came home to Maplewood in time for breakfast. She looked a little pale and she felt anxious as to what the day might bring forth; but she felt that propriety demanded that she go home for the day at least.

Richard, to her great relief, was looking much better and more rested, and he seemed quietly glad to see her. After breakfast she went with him to see the library and could not refrain from expressing her warm pleasure in the amount and quality of the work that he had done.

He then told her that he would leave that afternoon for West Virginia, as he had an engagement there.

“I shall never forget the days that I have spent here, Mrs. Hamilton. You have all been very kind to me. I am sorry not to see Mr. Hamilton again, but as I had finished I thought best not to wait for him. He can communicate with me by letter, if there is any need.”

As he spoke he handed her a card with his West Virginian address on it. Phoebe felt her eyes grow

misty. He was making such a manly effort to be brave.

"You must come to see us," she said gently, "any time that you are in our part of the world. We shall always be glad to see you."

"I shall hope to come some day, if I may," he answered simply, and then they talked of other things.

The day was a busy one. After an early tea Richard said good-bye to Phoebe, and William and the boys took him to the station in the automobile. As he took Phoebe's hand in his and looked into her eyes at parting for one instant she saw the imprisoned soul of the man look out; but he turned away quickly and was gone.

It was better so she said to herself. She was glad that he was gone. There was no place for him in her life. None. Yet all the same she missed him! She missed his pleasant manner, she missed his companionable talk, but most of all she missed the atmosphere of tender thoughtfulness of *her* that he had surrounded her with.

Then Paul came home, and they planned to go away for a while. Phoebe and Paul were in favor of the mountains, but the boys were for the seashore, and the boys finally won.

They were a bright, happy party at the seashore, and Paul and Clay won the admiration of the colony, for their swimming was remarkably fine for boys of their age.

They came home rested and refreshed, and Phoebe took up again the thread of her quiet life at Maplewood. But the days were very monotonous. She tried to interest herself in outside affairs, and she found pleasure in the church work and in the charity work that her increased means enabled her to do. But her evenings were dull and lonely. The boys were working hard at school, and Phoebe insisted on their spending the afternoons in the open air so, except at mealtime, she was alone most of the day and every evening. Paul had found an accumulation of work at the office on his return from the seashore, and had to work every evening now to make up for the holiday.

To a woman preëminently designed as Phoebe was for a full, happy home life the continued loneliness was very disappointing.

“Oh, Paul,” she cried, more than once, “I *need* you so! Can’t you manage to be with me a little more this winter?”

Then he would be as tender as the tenderest heart could wish, and would tell her that the separation would not be much longer, for things were beginning to go as he had been planning all these years that they should go.

With this she tried to be content, but there were many times when she was very lonely. She would not allow her mind to dwell on Richard Carey at all. The anguish of mind that she had endured during the last weeks of his stay in Melrose had

cured her of her folly. She knew that but for the mercy of God she might have committed some even greater sin or folly against Paul and her sons than she had been guilty of, something that even their love could not have overlooked. The feeling of remorse for what she had made Richard suffer was often present with her, however, and made her grave and depressed. She had found that "the pleasures of sin were but for a season," and that they left a bitter taste in the mouth.

Christmas with its usual festivities came and went. Annie and Bruce and the children came up for the week, and they had a happy, merry time together. The children's pleasure in the pretty Christmas-tree that Phoebe and the boys arranged for them filled Phoebe's heart with pure pleasure. Then, too, she greatly enjoyed the packing and sending of a big box of good things to Clay. This had to be sent a month before Christmas, and all the family contributed something to it. Even Mammy Linda knit him a pair of soft slippers with her own feeble old hands. Phoebe sent a large framed picture of herself. It was beautifully tinted and had her sweetest expression; it was very lovely. When they saw it, Paul and the boys teased her about being vain, but Phoebe laughed and said nothing.

One morning during the first week in the new year Eloise came running in.

"Oh, Phoeb," she cried, "I have such news!"

Nat is coming home, and is going to bring his bride. Think of there being a bride after all these years!"

"Who is she?" asked Phoebe, greatly interested.

"She is a little English girl that he met at Hong Kong last year. He fell in love with her, but she wouldn't marry him then. She has evidently changed her mind, for they are to be married on the tenth of this month, and will sail with the fleet immediately. . . . Think of having dear old Nat back after all these years of wandering about the face of the earth. Neither of you ever said anything about it to me, but I always half fancied that *you* were the cause of Nat's leaving home, and going into the navy. . . . Well, well, we must have an awfully swell reception for them as soon as they arrive, and of course, Phoeb, you are to help receive. What will you wear? I haven't a suitable dress, and I told Cliff this morning that I would just have to have something really sweet. And what do you think he had the impudence to tell me?"

"I am sure I don't know," answered Phoebe, smiling.

"He said he'd bet Mrs. Hamilton wouldn't have to have a new dress, and that he'd wager she would outshine every other woman there. You see what I have to submit to for having a grand-looking creature like you for a best friend," and Eloise kissed Phoebe lightly on each of her smooth cheeks.

The bride and groom arrived the week before

Lent, and the reception was a great success. For once Phoebe entered into the spirit of a *function*, and worked herself weary arranging the little girls' dresses and helping to plan the decorations and the refreshments.

The little bride was very modest and fair—the sixth daughter of an impoverished earl—and was rather overcome at the grandeur of the preparations made in her honor. She confided to Paul, who looked very distinguished in his evening dress, that she would much have preferred a good game of tennis or a long ride on horseback to the grand reception that Eloise had planned. Nat was so gallant and handsome in his full naval uniform that the little lady was almost hidden under the shadow of his glory.

Eloise wore cream lace over a delicate green silk, and looked sweet and charming. Phoebe was stately and beautiful in a dress of heavy ivory white velvet, beaded with pearls, and she wore a heavy rope of pearls (heirlooms from Aunt Allison) around her neck and in the soft waves of her dark hair.

“Don’t tell Cliff,” she whispered mischievously to Eloise, “but my dress is new too. I go out so little in the evening that I had nothing at all suitable for such an event as this.”

“If I only had two great boys like yours, I certainly would go out whenever I felt like it. If I were you, I’d make Paul take me somewhere every evening.”

Phoebe smiled a little sadly, but said nothing, and Eloise ran on, "But I can hardly ever go at all, I have so many babies." She tried hard to look ill used, but the dimples would come. It was well known that she was the most dotingly fond mother in Melrose.

One morning in February Phoebe went as usual to take Mammy Linda's breakfast to her and found the old woman dead in her chair.

Phoebe and Paul and the boys and Hester and William all went down to Sunny Side to the funeral. They laid her by the side of the young husband that had preceded her over fifty years before.

"You know, Paul, I can't help wondering if Mammy and her husband will know each other after all these years," Phoebe said that evening as she and Paul sat together in the gloaming at Sunny Side.

Bruce was out on his rounds, Annie was putting the little ones to bed, and little Phoebe and Paul and Clay had gone for the mail. Paul took Phoebe's hand gently in his, and said:

"Well, I suppose it is just as well not to think of those things, but I think she is much more likely to know your father and mother. I am quite sure that they were much more important to her than her husband that died so many years ago."

After a pause Phoebe said: "How lovely it would be if we could be together like this every

evening. I wonder if you will come and stay with me when I get to be old."

Paul laughed. "I'll have to. When you are old I shall certainly be old too."

Bruce came in and asked Phoebe to sing. She sat and sang softly in the twilight, and the two men listened to each lingering note. Even the baby up-stairs in her little white bed raised her curly head and said, "Ush! shing!" And the children all lay quiet to listen.

CHAPTER XIX

Charlotte Chippendale and Marcia Carey had been life-long friends. They had gone to school together, had married near the same time, and had been left widows early in life. Charlotte had one child, a little girl, and Marcia had two fine boys. They belonged to one of Boston's most exclusive circles, and were neither rich nor new. They had always lived in the same quiet street; the children had grown up together, and they were almost as intimate as brothers and sister.

All Minerva Chippendale's life Richard and Oliver Carey had been her heroes, but, as time went on and the gentle little girl grew into a woman, it was to Richard that her heart turned. He became her ideal.

The boys treated her with affectionate indifference, and tolerated her as a playmate only because she was Minerva, or "Minna," as they called her.

The years passed. The three children had grown up and had finished their courses at college. Minerva was gentle and refined and quite pretty, with a sweet, quiet, pensive beauty. All her young girlhood, however, had been overshadowed by what

seemed to be a hopeless love. Richard Carey treated her with the gentle deference that he accorded to all women, but otherwise only with the affectionate regard with which he might have treated a younger sister. He had always been a social favorite because of his good looks and his attractive manner, and many bright eyes had sought his favor; but Richard Carey had remained heart whole.

Charlotte Chippendale, at all times a most devoted mother, gradually discovered that Minerva loved Richard. She was a resourceful woman and she had force of character. She was never one to sit idly by when things were going wrong. She immediately took steps to help matters: she knew that Richard did not love Minerva, but she also knew that he was eminently suitable as a husband for her, so she set about teaching him to love her daughter. She overwhelmed Richard with attention. He was invited to lunch and to dinner, and he was always thrown as a matter of course with Minerva and treated as a son of the house. Charlotte managed that he should always be seen with her and Minerva at concerts, at lectures, or at the opera until his attentions began to be noticed by their friends.

Richard was either too guileless or too indifferent to heed where matters were trending. Things had been at this pass for some months. People were beginning to talk and to couple the young people's names.

Charlotte went to spend the morning and take lunch with Marcia. They grew quite confidential, as women usually do over their work-bags in front of a cozy fire. Charlotte spoke of Richard and Oliver in the highest and most affectionate terms. Then she said that as an old and intimate friend she took the liberty of mentioning that she hoped before long to give Marcia some very pleasant news about Richard and Minerva.

“Nothing is settled as yet,” she went on, “but I know Richard to be the soul of honor, and that he would compromise no woman, least of all Minerva, unless his intentions were serious. As for my own dear child I feel that I can say now what I would not have said before Richard commenced to show his intentions: she has always loved him, and I am sure that an engagement between them will be for her happiness.”

Looking at the clock, she gave a little cry of dismay, and, saying that she had an engagement with the Colonial Dames at three o’clock, she gathered up her sewing and tripped daintily home, quite satisfied with her morning’s work.

Later in the day when Richard came in, Marcia spoke to him.

“I am very much pleased, Richard,” she said, “to know that you and Minerva are about to arrange matters so satisfactorily to us all. It will be a gratification to me to see you marry so fine a girl—a girl that we all *know*.”

Richard looked amazed. "Why, mother," he answered, "I don't know what you mean! I am sure neither Minerva nor I ever gave such a thing a thought."

"What has your continued attendance on her meant, if it has not meant that?" Marcia remonstrated.

"I assure you that I never thought of such a thing in connection with her," Richard replied. "As for my continued attendance on her, I have only been there when I have been invited, and have only gone out with them when they seemed to have no other escort."

"At any rate, your names are being coupled, and no gentleman, least of all a Carey, has a right to compromise a trusting girl. I happen to know on good authority that Minna does care for you, and she is the girl of all others that I would be pleased to see you marry. I am getting old, now, my son, and it would give me great pleasure to see you and Oliver well married, and to see my own grandchildren growing up around me before I die."

Marcia's eyes filled with tears, and her lips trembled a little as she spoke. Richard was very fond of this tiny, dainty mother. He kissed her gently, and told her that he would think over what she had said.

He had a very affectionate regard for Minerva, and there was no one else that he cared for. He

was old enough to settle down, he told himself, and Minna was a dear girl with no nonsense about her.

One spring evening after having taken rather more pains than usual with his appearance, he went to the Chippendales' to call, and when he came away he was engaged to Minerva. There was great rejoicing in the two families, and there were numerous luncheons and dinners in honor of the engaged couple.

This was the way that matters stood at the time that we first saw Richard and Minerva walking home together one May evening.

While Richard was at Maplewood he was so fully taken up with the new life and with the experience of life that he was having, that beyond an occasional hastily written letter he gave little thought to Minerva.

His stay in West Virginia was brief, as he worked almost night and day to finish the work and get away. One warm afternoon the latter part of August he arrived in Boston.

Mrs. Carey had gone with Mrs. Chippendale and Minerva to a select mountain resort in the Green Mountains. Only Oliver was at home. His work kept him in the city the greater part of the summer, and Sigrid, their old housekeeper, made him comfortable.

Oliver was just sitting down to his lonely dinner when Richard walked in. Oliver was appalled at how ill and worn Richard looked.

Richard scarcely tasted his soup; the roast fowl and the fruit suffered the same fate. Then, pleading extreme weariness, he went up to his room, which Sigrid had made comfortable with snowy sheets and a pile of clean towels. He paid no attention to these things, however, and throwing off his coat he lay face downwards on the white bed. He thought over all his troubles once more.

He must not wish Phoebe for his own, he told himself. He must love her only as a friend. He could never hope to see her, nor hear her sweet voice again. Yet even now he could hear it ringing in some of the songs that they had loved to sing together. Could he never get away from the sound? There was the scent of roses in his room, and he had hoped never to smell another while he lived. Toward morning he fell into a restless sleep only to dream that he saw Phoebe smiling up at him as he looked at her out of the library window. He tried to get to her, but there was some terrible barrier, he could not tell what, and as he was struggling to go to her he woke.

It was late, for the sun was shining, and he could hear Sigrid singing somewhere down-stairs. After a while he heard Oliver close his door and go down-stairs, but Richard felt strangely indifferent to everything about him. Turning his face to the wall, he slept again. Late in the day, almost at lunch time, Sigrid came up to see if he was awake. He had a high fever and was raving in delirium.

The old servant was very much alarmed, for she was devoted to Richard and Oliver, having helped to take care of them all their lives. She ran downstairs and telephoned for the doctor and Oliver.

They arrived at the same time, and the doctor pronounced Richard's illness an attack of brain-fever, brought on by some strain under which he had been living. He would either have to be moved to the hospital, or he would have to have a nurse at home. The latter course was decided upon. Telegrams were hurriedly sent to Mrs. Carey and Minerva, and by noon of the next day they had arrived at home.

Richard's fever ran very high and his delirium was most distressing. He seemed to be begging for some one or something, and they could not make out who or what it was. He would begin by muttering, and then speaking louder he would cry a word or name, they could not tell which, in every tone of endearment or supplication of which his expressive voice was capable. At such times it was heartrending to be with him, and the nurse always had to give him an anodyne to soothe him. At other times he would talk glibly but unintelligibly for hours at a time, when only Oliver could quiet him.

Gradually, however, as his strength grew less he grew quiet, and for days he lay in a heavy stupor without even a tremor of the long dark eyelashes that swept his flushed cheeks.

Minerva had been very brave from the first, and had insisted on taking her turn with the nursing and as Mrs. Carey was never strong, she had finally yielded to Minerva's earnest desire to be a help.

Richard never knew Minerva, though sometimes Oliver or Mrs. Carey could bring a gleam of intelligence to his eyes. He always held off from Minerva—not only as if he did not know her, but as if the sight of her was distasteful to him. It was hard on the girl, but she bore up under it bravely. One day she rushed from his room, and throwing herself into her mother's arms wept as if her heart would break.

Finally, after weeks of weary watching and of almost despairing anxiety, the fever disappeared, and one morning Richard woke up normal. His strength returned very slowly, and it was late in September before he could be taken to a quiet place in the country. Here he crawled slowly back to health.

CHAPTER XX

During the first few weeks in the country Richard was patient and gentle, but very hard to rouse. He seemed not to take any interest in anything and his face wore a far-away expression that made Minerva's heart ache. Her face too had been pathetic in its look of quiet suffering during these trying weeks.

One day she was reading to Richard, and glancing up surprised on his face a look that went to her heart because of its weariness and sadness. She laid the book down and took a quick resolve.

"Richard," she said, "there is something I have wished to say to you for weeks, but I have not had the courage to say it. You have been so weak and so ill that I hated to hurt or annoy you. Now I shall say it, because I think it is best for both of us. I have decided that I will not marry you."

She spoke almost roughly: then she looked pathetically at him. Richard colored faintly and looked at her gravely.

"Why, Minerva?" he asked gently.

"Because," she answered, sadly, "you do not love me. I found it out when you were ill. There is some one else, Richard."

"I thought that we had not pretended to be very much in love, Minna." Richard's voice was very gentle, almost tender. "You know, I always told you that was why I cared for you. You are so sensible—you never expected me to talk love."

"I know I always said that, and I let you suppose that it was true, but I have found out differently. After I heard you talk to that other—that other woman—in your delirium," Minerva's voice faltered, "I decided that I was not willing never to have you talk love to me! There is no use for me to pretend, Richard. I care terribly, but I will not marry you when I know that you do not love me."

Poor Minerva looked down, very hard, at her pretty white hands. Then suddenly seeming to remember something, she pulled off the pretty ring that she wore and handing it to him she ran into the house. Richard sat as if stunned, but through the numbness there was a sensation of mingled pain and relief—pain at her pain, relief that he was no longer bound.

He had suffered so much himself that his heart was tender toward the suffering of all others, but he was glad not to be bound and his innate sense of honesty was relieved at not having to pretend.

The next morning Mrs. Chippendale and Minerva went home. Richard did not know what explanation the girl had made, but at any rate he was relieved that nobody asked any questions. From that day he grew steadily better.

Mrs. Carey's heart told her that some great wrench had taken place in his life, but except that she was particularly tender to this tall son she made no allusion to what had occurred.

One day when she and Oliver were talking to Richard, suddenly the little lady seemed to recall something.

"By the way, you have never told me about the negroes in the south, Richard," she said. "Did you think to investigate their condition when you were there?"

Then Richard told her about Phoebe and old Mammy Linda. His voice was very gentle as he told the story, and when he had concluded his mother's eyes were full of tears.

That night Oliver stayed with him and begged him to tell him what had troubled him so much on this southern trip. Richard told the whole miserable story. These brothers had always been devoted to each other, and that night Richard went to sleep like a child on Oliver's breast.

By the last of October he was well enough to go back to the city, and shortly afterward he commenced work again. Minerva was sweet and gentle to him always, but when he suggested that they renew their engagement she flushed painfully and very gently and firmly declined.

The winter wore away. After Christmas things seemed to be brighter, and Richard had lost something of the hopeless look that he had worn all

winter. One afternoon he went to see Minerva. He had slipped back into the habit of dropping in there informally and he always found her sweet and restful. This particular afternoon, however, he had to wait until she came down. There was a vase of red roses on the table; their odor filled the pretty, dainty room. All at once he seemed to see again the moonlit garden at Maplewood. He was sitting by Phoebe's side on the rustic seat under the great elm, and he could smell again the red rose in her hair, while sleepy water-lilies rocked to the soft murmur of flowing water.

Suddenly the longing to look into her face, to hear her voice, to touch her hand, came over him like a physical sickness, and he rushed from the room.

The next morning saw him far on his way to the south.

CHAPTER XXI

Spring opened early in Melrose that year; by the first week in March it was as mild as May, and the woods were fragrant with jasmine and dogwood.

Paul and Clay had brought back large bunches of dogwood from the woods, and Phoebe had filled the vases and even the open fireplaces with branches of it. In the hall and library there were bowls of long stemmed purple violets. Phoebe too was dressed in a simple house-dress of some soft violet material, and had a bunch of violets stuck in her belt.

She was more lonely than ever for she missed poor old Mammy Linda. She was sitting idly in the library. On the table were writing materials, but she was not writing and she was not even pretending to read. She was evidently lonely. Presently she heard the bell ring; in another instant William, beaming with smiles of welcome, ushered Richard Carey into the room.

Even in that instant Phoebe was relieved to find that her pulse did not quicken by a single beat, and she was able to go forward and meet him absolutely without self-consciousness.

"Why, Mr. Carey," she said cordially, "I am so glad to see you," and she gave him her hand as she spoke.

He looked at her with tender, despairing eyes.

"Thank you, Mrs. Hamilton. . . . I came because I had to," he added desperately. But Phoebe chose not to hear.

"What have you done with yourself all this long time? Sit here near the window and tell me about yourself. And the fiancée? How is she?" Phoebe spoke lightly and quickly, not giving him time to answer until he recovered himself.

Richard smiled faintly, devouring her with his eyes the while.

"I have been quite well since Christmas," he answered, "and have been working hard. As for the fiancée, there is none. She has declined to marry me."

Phoebe made a sudden desperate resolution—desperate cases require desperate remedies.

"Perhaps she found out that you did not love her," she said gravely. "You know a woman can always tell. It wouldn't be possible for a man to deceive her, if she has had any experience."

Richard looked at her quizzically. She dropped her guard and let him see that she knew.

"Then you have known all this time?" he asked simply.

"Yes," said Phoebe, "I have known all this time; perhaps it will make it easier for you, if we discuss

it in this impersonal way. I understand that as an honorable man nothing else is possible for you, and yet maybe it is best that you should know that I knew it even before you did. I have thought of the matter a great deal, and I know that I have acted very badly to you, Mr. Carey. I knew it and let it go on until it meant a great deal to you. I have been greatly to blame. . . . Believe me, it would not be possible to change our relation, even if I were not already married to a man that I truly love. I am a great deal older than you are, and you deserve much more than I could ever have given you. Can you forgive me for the great wrong that I have done you? It would be sweet to me to feel that you would forgive me, and would be my friend —that we could meet as such without pain to either. Will you try to forgive me for the pain that I have caused you?" Phoebe held out her hand as she spoke. Richard took it gently in both his own and laid it softly against his cheek.

"I could not be angry with you if I tried," he said gently. "If you have done me any wrong I did not know it. You have taught me so much of what is beautiful that I am willing to bear the pain. I shall always love you, and since there is nothing else possible for me, then let us be friends."

"Let us never speak of this again then," said Phoebe, "and we shall be friends. When you go home tell the little sweetheart everything and start over. You will find it easier than you think. If she

loves you, and I think that she does, she will forgive you gladly."

Then they talked of other things, of his work, of his hopes, of his plans; and when he left Maplewood Richard's heart was lighter and his gray eyes more smiling than they had been in many a day.

Phoebe asked him to stay to dinner, but he declined. He felt that he could not just yet.

That evening, however, he came and they sang together once more. Everything was just as it had been, except that Richard treated Phoebe with even more gentle deference than he had always done, and was more friendly in his manner to Paul and the boys.

Paul came in unexpectedly, and for the first time in his married life he experienced a little qualm of jealousy when he heard Phoebe's voice mingling in such sweet accord with Richard's.

"Who is with your mother?" he asked. He was not reassured when they told him that it was Richard Carey.

There was a vague feeling of unrest in his heart during the whole evening; he looked questioningly from one to the other when they laughed and jested and seemed to understand each other so well. In his own heart he questioned Phoebe's taste in being so friendly with this Yankee that they knew absolutely nothing about.

CHAPTER XXII

The evening turned suddenly chill, as is often the case in early spring. Phoebe had a wood-fire made in the study; they all drew up in a circle around it and talked until late. Finally Richard rose to say good-bye, as his train left early in the morning and he would not see them again. Paul and Phoebe were left alone. Paul took Phoebe's hand in his, and sat looking gravely into the fire. Presently he said:

"You know, Phoebe, this is the very first time I have ever felt that I did not make you quite happy. The loneliness of your life here seemed to come to me to-night as never before."

Phoebe's dark eyes filled slowly.

"There is no use denying that fact, Paul. I do get very, very lonely at times, but as for being unhappy, I am never that. Don't you know that I thank God every day of my life for the happiness that he has given to me in you and the boys? I am quite, *quite* happy, but I do need *you*," and smiling through her tears she looked at him.

But Paul was not satisfied. He went on gravely: "When I came in here to-night and heard you

singing with Carey, I seemed to understand for the first time how lonely you must be to make you get so very friendly with a man that you know absolutely nothing about."

Phoebe smiled. That was the way the wind blew, was it? A spirit of mischief took possession of her, and she said demurely:

"You forget that Mr. Carey was here in the house practically all last summer, and that you went to New York and left me here in his care. I didn't know you objected to my singing with him, for we sang together almost every evening last summer. I understood you to say that you considered him a perfect gentleman."

"Well, I suppose he is a gentleman—I have no reason to think otherwise—but it did make me feel peculiar to come in and find you two singing together as if I did not exist. And I might as well admit that I did not enjoy the feeling one bit. As for your having sung with him all last summer I don't know that that helps matters any," and Paul laughed lugubriously despite himself.

Phoebe said gravely:

"It is rather silly for us to be getting into an alteration over Richard Carey at this late day. Believe me, Paul, if I would have been injured—in any way—by having him here and singing with him, the harm would have been done long ago."

Paul started; the blood in his veins suddenly ran cold. Was it possible, he asked himself, that he in

his blind absorption in business had placed Phoebe in a position to be insulted by this wretch?

“You don’t mean that he has ever dared to say anything to you, and that you have allowed it? O Phoebe!”

He dropped her hand, and the mingled rage and pain of his tone made her know that she had gone far enough.

“No, Paul darling. He never said anything to me in his life that you might not have heard, but there is a long, sad story about his stay here last summer. I have wished to tell you and have felt that you should know, but there never seemed to be any suitable time. You have been so busy, and we are so seldom together. If you will let me, I will tell you now.”

Paul laid his hand heavily on her shoulder, and through dry lips said, “Tell me.”

Beginning at the beginning she told the whole story of her temptation and sin in allowing Richard to love her. She told of her vanity and of her folly, of the misery that she had suffered when she found out what she had done. She told of the horror of the position that she had placed herself in, and of her agony and remorse when she found out what she had done.

When she finished she did not look at Paul for an instant, then she turned to him with sweetest pleading in her voice.

"O Paul, my husband," she cried, "can you ever forgive me?"

But Paul did not seem to hear. He sat as if turned to stone, his hands clenched and his jaws set, looking straight before him. After a while he began to sob great dry heartbreaking sobs, and Phoebe out of her deep humility and contrition sobbed too. She had scarcely ever seen a man cry, and never had she seen Paul cry. The foundations of the world seemed to her to be giving away. Presently Paul controlled himself by a mighty effort; turning to her he took her face in his hands and looking into her eyes as if he would read her very soul, he said:

"Phoebe, are you sure, *sure* that you still love me? That you do not regret anything? I could not bear it if I felt that you were bound by duty and honor alone! Oh, fool, fool, that I have been to be so taken up with my business and ambition that I have neglected the very heart of my home. O Phoebe! my love! my love! . . . I couldn't live without you! You have no idea what you are to me. . . . And to think that I might have lost you!"

He bowed his head on his hands and sobbed anew. It seemed to come over Phoebe as it had not done in many years how much he really loved her, and even in her distress of mind this knowledge was like a strain of sweetest music to her love-hungry heart.

"Oh, no, Paul, there never was any danger of

that," she cried. "As soon as that thought entered my mind I knew that it was you, and you only that I loved. The thing about Richard Carey that charmed me was his companionship, and the consciousness of being loved that he made me feel. I have been so lonely and so hungry for love and companionship all these years!" Phoebe looked at him, pathetic in her longing to be forgiven.

"When I think of what I have subjected you to and of the danger that I have placed you in through my carelessness and selfishness, my heart faints within me. I feel that I have failed in that which was highest. To think that I swore to love and to cherish you, and that I have brought you to this!" Paul groaned.

Suddenly something else seemed to occur to him. He turned and asked suspiciously, "If all this took place last summer, and he has no hope, why was he here to-night, and why were you so friendly?" He spoke almost fiercely.

Phoebe told him of how Richard had come and of their conversation.

"Possibly it was not womanly in me to speak to him as I did," she said; "but I felt that I had done him a great wrong, and I was trying to do all in my power to help to make it right. Do you think I did wrong to tell him that I would be his friend?"

"No, I suppose not," Paul answered slowly. "It would not be exactly generous for you to decline to be his friend, especially when I appeared to be

so indifferent that he probably thought that I did not care."

"Do you object to my being his friend?" asked Phoebe. "If you do, I will write and tell him that you feel that you cannot trust me, and that I must withdraw the promise that I made him to-day."

"Not trust you! Why should you write him that? *Of course* I trust you. Haven't you given me every reason to trust you, and haven't I myself to blame for all that has occurred? O Phoebe! I promise you that you will never again have cause for complaint. Never again while I live will you need companionship and love. From this day forth my sweet wife and my home shall be my first consideration."

"You don't mean——?"

"Yes, I do mean that I will give up this business that keeps me away from you all the time. I have been thinking of giving it up any way. I have begun to see that it is telling on my strength. Dr. Carmichael told me only yesterday that I would have to hold up or be held up. I didn't mean to follow his advice though, but you see I had no idea of this," and Paul looked at her pleadingly.

But Phoebe did not notice; she was thinking of something else.

"Why, where did you see Dr. Carmichael yesterday?" she asked quickly.

"I went to his office to see him about a little

trouble that I had been having; he said that I must take it easier, or I would break down," he answered.

"Are you ill, Paul, and didn't tell me?" Phoebe cried reproachfully.

"No, I'm not ill. I just have not been quite well. I didn't tell you anything about it because I knew well enough what you would say. So I went to the doctor and paid him for advice that I could have had free." Paul looked tenderly at her as he spoke.

Phoebe came and laid her cheek tenderly against his and said: "I wouldn't have let you give up your beloved business to stay with me; but if the doctor says you must, why that is a different matter, and I will take it as an interposition of Providence in my favor. But, Paul, what will you do? You would die if you were not working at something." Then she exclaimed ecstatically, "I know! We will go to the low country and plant rice!"

BOOK V

THE EVEN SONG.

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand
Who saith, "A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor
be afraid!"

—*Browning.*

CHAPTER I

Paul had always been a man to act quickly: his judgment was seldom at fault, his mind grasped a situation instantly. When Phoebe said, "We will go to the low country and plant rice," he recognized at once that it was the thing to do.

For the next few months he was very busy settling affairs with the mills and helping his successor to become accustomed to the work; but he did not forget the lesson that he had so dearly learned, and each day he was with Phoebe, either for dinner or in the afternoon, or in the evening. She bloomed out under his loving attention like a late yet perfect rose, and the handsome man and the beautiful woman so often seen together were the admiration of Melrose.

Maplewood was entailed in favor of Phoebe's children, and could not be sold, so they decided to leave William and Hester in charge there.

The boys were delighted at the idea of living in the country, and Paul was surprised to find that a great deal of his boyish store of information and enthusiasm came back with the prospect of working with the land once more. He found that much of the rice land that he had inherited from his father

had grown up into woodland, but that the whole tract had increased in value since the great era of prosperity had come to the south.

There was much, very much, to be done; but before another year had rolled over their heads they were comfortably settled at Waverly, as they called their attractive country home; and Paul was as deep in planting rice and in raising stock as he had been in the manufacture of cotton. There was this difference, however, that his home was the centre of all his operations, and he and Phoebe were together the greater part of each day.

Fortunately Aunt Allison's legacy placed them above poverty, and Paul's well planned investments commenced to bring in some returns, so that their living at least was secure. For the first two years they were satisfied just to keep things together.

They have been at Waverly for four years. They have become a great factor for good in their county and are interested in everything that adds to the general uplift. They have started a mission for the negroes, which is doing good work, and in connection with it Phoebe is greatly interested in a home for helpless old persons that are yet able to use their hands.

Last winter Richard Carey and his sweet, gentle wife, Minerva, visited Paul and Phoebe, and became greatly interested in the work of the inmates of this home. They and Richard's mother have

made many contributions to the comfort of the poor old people, and have aided materially in disposing of the surplus products in the north. Richard has a position in the Congressional Library in Washington, and he and Minerva have a charming apartment out in the northwestern section of the city. Paul and Phoebe called on them there last spring, when Paul went to Washington to interview the Bureau of Agriculture and Irrigation in regard to some progressive improvements that he was planning to install in the rice fields.

Paul's mother and sister still live in a little vine-covered cottage across the fields from Waverly, and having Paul and Phoebe and the boys near them has brought a great happiness into their quiet lives.

Paul and Clay have been at a military school for two years, but this year they are to enter Princeton. They stand six feet two, and are handsome in person and noble in character.

As they grow older the difference in their tastes has become marked, for Paul likes scientific while Clay prefers literary studies. They are absolutely devoted to each other, and are as much alike as two peas. Phoebe and a chosen few of their girl friends are the only persons that can tell them apart with any degree of certainty.

Once or twice each year Clay writes to Phoebe soul-stirring letters from his far-away home. He has never contracted leprosy, and is full of earnest love for the poor souls among whom he ministers.

Eloise and her family make long visits to Waverly in the winter, and often Clifford runs down for a day's shooting when the rice-birds are in season. Paul and Phoebe ride and drive a great deal, and they often run up to Melrose in the automobile for a visit.

Sunny Side is just half way between Waverly and Melrose, and often Phoebe takes Annie and the children home with her for a few days. Bruce is one of the prominent doctors of the state. He has a young assistant, so, as he laughingly says, he is no longer tied down to pills and nostrums, but runs down to Waverly in his own automobile every once in a while.

Phoebe's life is full and sweet, and as for Paul, he is like a new man. He never tires of planning for his wife's pleasure and happiness.

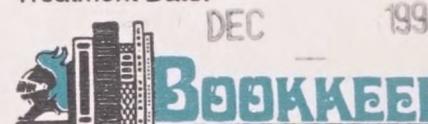
He has been urged to run for the senate from his county, but he prefers to live quietly at home.

To-day Phoebe and Paul are at Maplewood for a short stay. Phoebe is in the drawing-room, and in the gathering twilight, she is singing softly the sweet old hymn, "My Ain Countrie." Outside, sitting on the piazza, under the first faint star of evening, Paul lifts his face to heaven and thanks God for his wife.

And so we leave them, feeling sure that while standing together for the right neither need have any fear of falling.

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